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Building Community in Divisive Times

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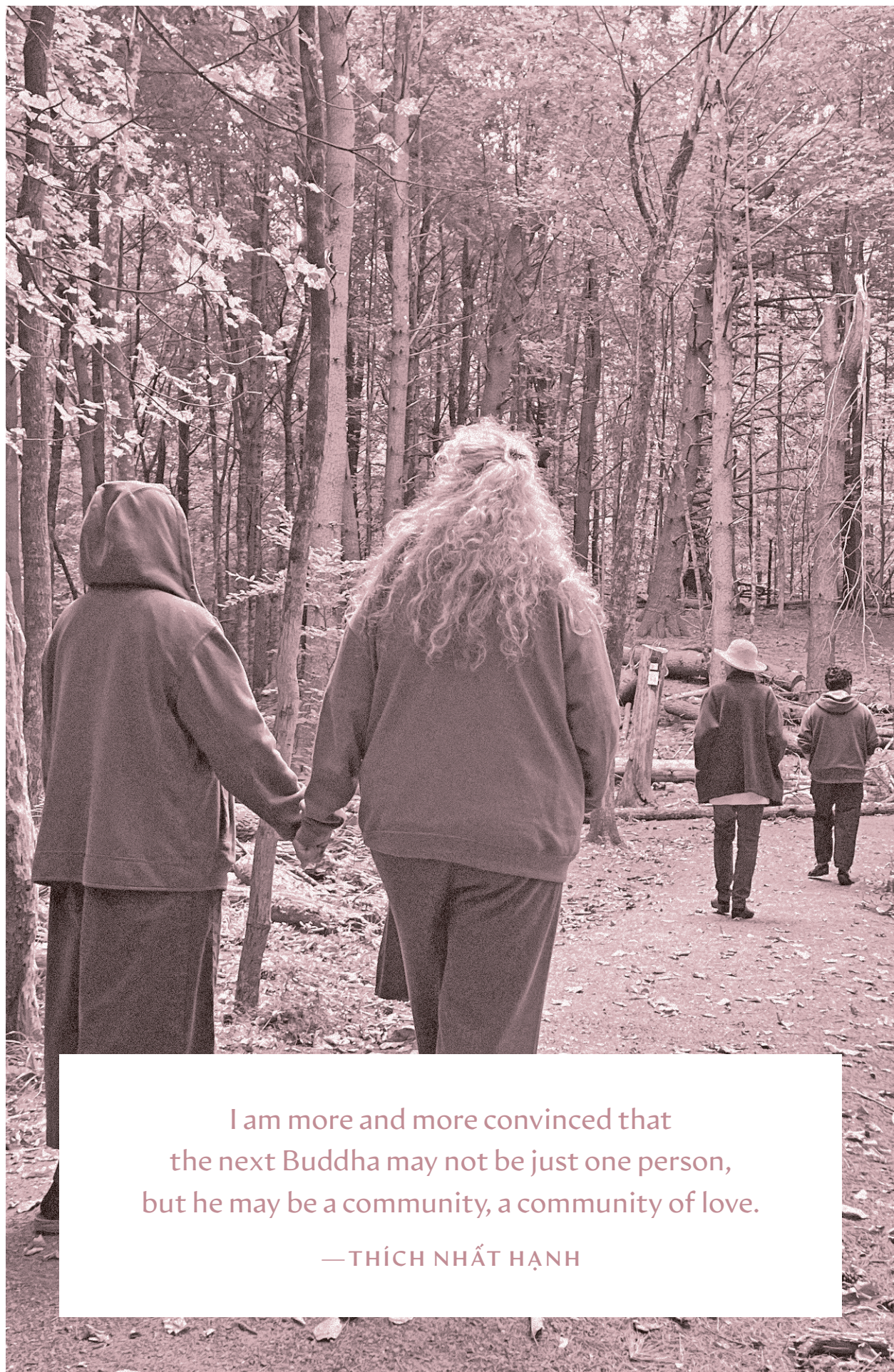
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I am more and more convinced that
the next Buddha may not be just one person,
but he may be a community, a community of love.

—THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH

Welcome Letter

COMMUNITY IN TIMES OF DIVISION

Turn to someone you love—or even someone you dislike—and let them know you value their presence. They don't have to be or do anything to be worthy of your trust and your appreciation. These teachings—rooted in the Four Mantras, later expanded by Thầy to five and even six—when put into practice, are a deep form of resistance to the forces of division, hatred, and greed that we find ourselves immersed in, both in the United States and globally.¹

The Buddha taught that a people who come together in harmony, and speak about what is going on in the country, cannot be easily conquered. Now is the time for us to put this instruction into practice.

Meditation has not ever been, in the Plum Village community, an individual matter. Now that we see so clearly how systems of power—even supposed democratic ones—can be abused, people around the world are depending on the Dharma. Our practice can help us resist abuses of power, else they will continue to wreak havoc on the most vulnerable: the poor, immigrants, the climate, and those who don't conform to the majority's definition of normal.

In these pages, we bring you stories of hope and resistance. Please don't hesitate to make good use of what is here to build communities of trust and open communication, right where you are. We need your practice to make a future possible.

Brother Pháp Lưu

Advisor and Editor

¹ Thích Nhất Hạnh, "The Six Mantras," 2012, Plum Village, <https://plumvillage.org/library/dharma-talks/the-six-mantras-2>.

Ordained in 2003, **Brother Chân Pháp Lưu (Brother Stream)** received Transmission of the Lamp from Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh in 2011. He helped start Wake Up, as well as the Happy Farm, and has been working with Wake Up Schools since its inception in 2012. He has served as a monastic editor for several of Thích Nhất Hạnh's books, including *Happy Teachers Change the World*, *Stepping into Freedom*, *Cracking the Walnut*, *The Admonitions and Encouraging Words of Master Guishan*, and *How to Focus*. Brother Pháp Lưu leads mindful backpacking retreats in nature around Deer Park Monastery in Escondido, California, US, and recently coauthored *Hiking Zen* with Brother Pháp Xả. Brother Pháp Lưu, who works with scientists at Dartmouth College and Harvard to develop research on the effect of Plum Village mindfulness practices on children, also serves on the Advisory Board of the Thích Nhất Hạnh Center for Mindfulness in Public Health at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.



Thích Nhất Hạnh's Vision: *The Village Way* as the Beloved Community of Engaged Buddhism

Brother Pháp Dung outlines Thầy's aspiration
and vision for residential spiritual communities
as a service and refuge for society.



Dear Friends on the Path,

Lately, the word *village* has been occupying my thoughts, prompted by our dear teacher's use of this word in the name *Plum Village*, our first practice center in the West that he established. He used *village* rather than opting for words like *monastery*, *temple*, or *meditation center*. Many well-known Vietnamese monasteries, such as *Thiền Viện Trúc Lâm* (Bamboo Forest Meditation Center) or *Chùa Từ Hiếu* (Compassionate Filial Piety Temple), carry these traditional terms in their names.

By the time I was ordained in Plum Village in 1998, Thầy was already well known in the West, and Plum Village had become a popular mindfulness practice center, no longer just a gathering place for Vietnamese refugees. Plum Village was all that I knew, and I took its name for granted, not giving it much thought. That was until recently, when I read a letter titled *Non-Action*, written by our teacher in 1973 to Brother Chau Toan, his younger monastic brother, in which Thầy reflected on the village cooperatives established

by the Jewish people in Israel in the early twentieth century. This letter was part of a collection of letters recently compiled and published as *In Love and Trust* by Parallax Press.

In this letter, Thầy draws insights from Jewish cooperative communities (the *moshav ovdim* and *kibbutz*) he learned about in Israel, envisioning a village model rooted in mindful spiritual living, mutual support and kinship, and sustainable ethical livelihood. He also distinguishes his vision for these new communities from past socialist cooperatives by emphasizing that they will be formed through volunteerism and will include a spiritual component.

I am convinced that when our beloved teacher Thầy established our community, he intentionally chose the name *Plum Village* to reflect his deep aspiration—carried since the war in Vietnam—to create a refuge center far more expansive than a temple or monastery, a progressive model for social development. After the war and his exile from Vietnam, Thầy established Plum Village in the West to embody his vision of a



living, dynamic community, where the monastery is just one essential but integrated element of a larger societal vision. This vision, which I call *the village way*, or *làng quê* in Vietnamese, aims to build a community that goes beyond traditional religious structures, offering a holistic model for living mindfully and spiritually, close to nature, with mutual support and collective responsibility. I believe his vision was to model the traditional village life in Vietnam, which is evident in his use of the word *hamlet*, or *xóm* in Vietnamese, to describe the different communities within Plum Village, such as *Xóm Mới* (New Hamlet) and *Xóm Thượng* (Upper Hamlet). These terms, *xóm* and *làng*, are rooted in Vietnamese village culture, where they describe the various neighborhoods that make up an interconnected community. *Làng* means village, or *thôn* in Sino-Vietnamese, as in *Mai Thôn* (Plum Village's formal name), where *mai* means plum. *Quê* means countryside and connotes a simple rural lifestyle that is deeply connected to the land, community, and nature. *Làng quê* is an endearing term that evokes a life of simplicity, interconnection, care, and mutual accountability.

This article seeks to extend Thầy's message, reflecting on and exploring this notion of the *village way*, *làng quê*, and offering, in the end, an invitation to all our sanghas to consider the possibility of forming residential communities as the next level in realizing our teacher's vision.

BRIEF BACKGROUND AND INSPIRATION

I have always felt empowered and inspired when hearing Thầy, in many of his talks, describe our sanghas as communities of resistance. He saw the sangha as a collective force that resists not only external negativity and the gloomy narratives of modern society but also the internal obstacles that cloud our perception of life's wonders. Thầy believed that the world often promotes fear, anger, separation, and consumerism, which blind us to the interconnectedness and beauty of existence and our human species. By cultivating mindfulness, compassion, and collective care, the sangha resists these forces, creating an environment

where the wonders of life—love, joy, peace—can be recognized, nurtured, and shared. This resistance is not against people, but against the harmful mental patterns and societal structures that perpetuate suffering, disconnection, hate, and division. He encouraged us to form sanghas and establish practice centers that embody the very spirit of *the village way*, which he called Communities of Mindful Living.

I feel Thầy's earliest vision for social change remains as deeply relevant today as it was during the war. As technology and urbanization accelerate, many of us experience growing loneliness, isolation, and despair. Modern society often separates us from ourselves, each other, and Mother Earth, leaving behind a spiritual vacuum, especially in this digital age of gadgets, smartphones, and social media. The mental health of our families and society is inextricably linked to how we have organized our cities, neighborhoods, and communities, as well as to the individualist mindset our culture has long promoted. Neighbors not knowing each other has become the norm; "your side of the lawn is your business, not mine" is a widespread attitude. Meanwhile, the popular media's agenda continues to fuel division, suspicion, and hatred. It will truly take a village to resist this culture of hopelessness and despair.

Thầy foresaw these challenges and offered a practical, compassionate response rooted in communal living and spiritual practice. As meditation and mindfulness grew in popularity, Thầy emphasized the essential role of the Sangha, which he regarded as equally important as the other two jewels—the Buddha and the Dharma. He continued to lead large retreats, to offer people a direct experience of this village sense of togetherness, despite facing disapproval for such large gatherings. Thầy understood the power of the collective energy for healing and transformation, recognizing the interbeing nature of the individual and the collective. He consistently invited us to embrace the noble task of building the beloved community, a vision shared by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Thầy proclaimed that the twentieth century's emphasis on consumerist individualism must now give way to the twenty-first century's call for

communities of interbeing—or communities of mindful resistance—if we are to survive as a species. “Sangha building is the most noble task,” he often encouraged us.¹

Thầy’s dedication to building community and reviving the Vietnamese *village way* is not an abstract ideal or romantic nostalgia—it is a practical, embodied model for our times, one that was urgently needed for a country [Vietnam] suffering from the destruction of war. We can only imagine that in times of war, there was no room for ideological dreams—only applicable, real-world solutions that could bring real hope and purpose to the Vietnamese people being tormented. The term *lãng quê* suggests a deep love for the simple countryside values, the tender togetherness spirit of the village collective. This revival does not signal a sentimental return to a pre-modern agricultural past, but rather offers a clear and relevant response to today’s most pressing crises: loneliness, despair, separation, fear, hatred, and climate anxiety.

The *village way* blends spiritual practices of liberation and collective responsibility with active social engagement and exemplary ethical living. It is the hidden mycelia network that holds the spirit of the village community together. This spirit invites us not only to dream of a better society but also to build it with our hands and hearts, becoming the change we wish to see in the world—a healthy, sane, and compassionate society. In this way, the village or sangha becomes a living Dharma body—a tangible expression of the path of awakening, embodying our Buddha nature—guiding us toward a more mindful, resilient, and inclusive way of life. As Thầy proposed, the next Buddha will not be an individual but will be a community living and practicing together in harmony and awareness.

It is no wonder that Thầy often emphasized two essential topics during retreats: Sangha building and The Five Mindfulness Trainings—community and ethics, or spiritual development alongside social development. These teachings are deeply rooted in the Vietnamese tradition, where the village and temple served as the foundation of social cohesion, collective well-being,

and ethical livelihood and compassionate action for the benefit of others. Thầy’s renewal of Buddhism drew from this village soil, returning to these roots not to preserve them unchanged, but to reawaken their power in service to the crises of our times. Buddhism and mindfulness practice must embrace these two aspects if they are to avoid appropriating and individualizing this ancient spiritual tradition.

Thầy first brought this vision for social development to life in wartime Vietnam through the School of Youth for Social Service (SYSS), where he guided thousands of young volunteers in rebuilding and repairing villages destroyed by the war, and in establishing new experimental villages that embodied the integration of spiritual practice, social transformation, and self-determination. Their mission was to help villagers create a new way of life—fostering resilience, equity, and sovereignty while addressing poverty, disease, ignorance, passivity, and disorganization. These communities explored new approaches in economics, healthcare, education, and communal self-governance.² Each village became a living expression of the Dharma, integrating Buddhist ethics into daily life through mindful social engagement, community care, and sustainable agriculture. In doing so, they offered a powerful model of how contemplative practice and social action could be seamlessly woven together—a vision of Engaged Buddhism that continues to inspire and guide us today. These villages were truly communities of resistance to despair and hopelessness, so much so that the soldiers felt threatened and had to destroy them.

Central to Thầy’s vision is the *multifold Sangha*—monks, nuns, and laypeople—living in harmony, practicing together, and supporting one another in the collective journey of healing and transformation. While Thầy acknowledged the value of online sanghas, especially in times of crisis like the COVID pandemic, he continually reminded us of the irreplaceable importance of residential communities. Genuine human connection, collective awakening, and long-term spiritual nourishment require real presence and shared space. Virtual communities can inspire and

sustain, but they cannot fully replace the transformative power of embodied communal life. Thầy established Plum Village in the spirit of this *village way*—organizing daily life around mindfulness practices such as sitting, walking, eating, cooking, and caring for our shared spaces with deep awareness and contemplation. He restructured the monastery to function as a true community, where everyone contributes and serves: cutting vegetables, cleaning toilets, sweeping meditation halls, sanitizing dishes, or working in the office—all are expressions of mindfulness and communal care. At the heart of true brotherhood, sisterhood, and siblinghood lies mutual accountability and our shared interdependence. This is also the essence of the *village way*—showing up together with mindful presence.

THE VILLAGE WAY AT DEER PARK MONASTERY

At Deer Park Monastery (California, US), we continue to manifest Thầy's vision in concrete, tangible ways, reviving this spirit of the *village way* in response to the political, economic, and social challenges of our time, especially for this nation [the United States]. One of our most heartfelt aspirations is to establish a hamlet for lay practitioners at the foot of the monastery, offering an alternative community model deeply rooted in Thầy's teachings. This residential community will bring together diverse elements identified by our teacher in his 1973 letter and many articles about his vision for the SYSS. The lay hamlet will explore new models in economics, healthcare, education, organic farming, and communal self-governance based on the Plum Village tradition. This will be guided by the monastic community, which will serve as the spiritual beacon for the hamlet—the village temple. A lay friend of the monastery, during a presentation, proposed that this hamlet be called Simplicity Hamlet, where lay practitioners and families can come together to live mindfully and simply, embodying Thầy's vision of a healthy, sane, and compassionate society.

At the heart of the new lay hamlet will be the Happy Farm, where monastics and lay friends will collaborate to cultivate sustainable agriculture along with mindfulness practices and community living. Communal farming and food production will be an essential bond for all members of the village. So far, in just a few months, we have tilled the soil, sowed the first seeds, drilled a well, and installed solar panels to power a water pump and a 10,000-gallon storage tank, all with the help of many local community members. On our first tilling day, over sixty people arrived to joyfully work the land together. The village life is already a manifested reality, nourishing all who come to serve.

In addition, we have already begun to establish a mindfulness-based primary school in the Plum Village tradition, which will nurture children holistically, with compassion and happiness as its highest goals. This school is a continuation of the Wake Up Schools movement that seeks to foster happiness, resilience, peace, and joy in the field of education in order to support teachers and students, preparing them to meet the challenges of our modern global society. Education will not be limited to the classroom but will flow through all aspects of daily communal life. As we care for the future generations, we also aim to create an elder care center to support and honor the aging generation of our community, enhancing the quality of life through compassionate and life-affirming healthcare. Aging and illness are inevitable aspects of life. Our aspiration is to bring mindfulness practice into this area of community care, improving the quality of life for the elderly and creating a more sustainable way to serve and support them. We also envision craft enterprises and ethical businesses that contribute to the right livelihood and a self-reliant economy of the entire community. In addition, Deer Park aspires to become increasingly self-sufficient, powered by renewable energy, nourished by our own farming, and sustained by local water sources. Mindful stewardship of the Earth and its resources is woven into the fabric of our daily lives and is reflected in all the components of our multifold community—the monastery, the farm, the school,

the elder care center, and the entire village hamlet.

Our vision of sustainability is deeply rooted in Thầy's teachings and vision of the *village way*, where sustainability is not just about shared resources but also about how we live as human beings and treat one another, and how we relate to Mother Earth. Deer Park aspires to provide a direct, compassionate response to the crises of our time—mental imbalance, climate anxiety, social division, and spiritual disconnection—by embodying a sustainable way of cooperative living rooted in mindfulness, interbeing, and community.

Dear Dharma friends in our Plum Village sanghas, the *village way* is not just a vision—it is an invitation that remains profoundly relevant today, as Thầy once offered in his letters and articles to fellow social workers at the SYSS and in the Order of Interbeing. It is a call to walk and explore a different path together in mindful resistance, building real, thriving communities where the Dharma, love, simplicity, and interbeing are woven into daily life and become living models for social transformation and collective awakening. Movements rise and fade, retreats are occasional, and monthly sangha gatherings, while nourishing,

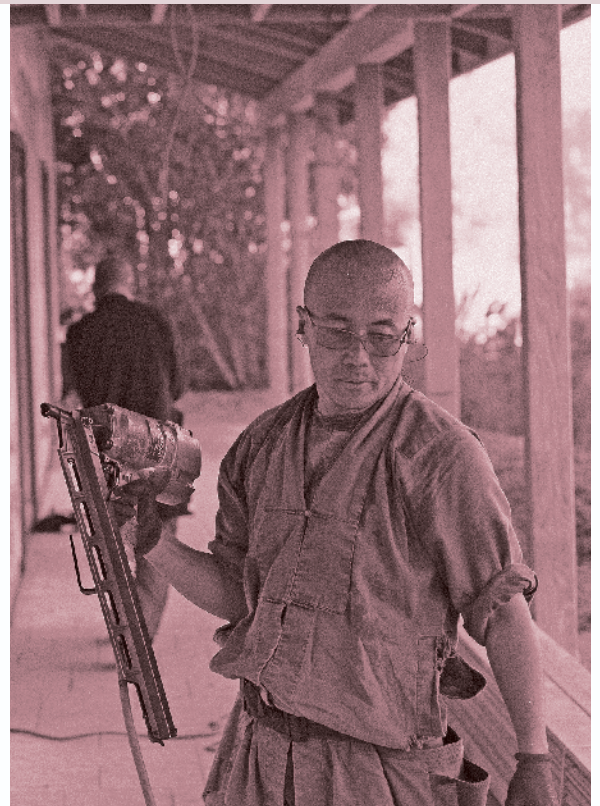
can only go so far. But a true, multifold, embodied spiritual community offers the steady, long-term support and continuation that has sustained the Buddha's Sangha for more than twenty-five centuries. This is a call to carry forward Thầy's deepest aspiration—born in a time of war and devastation—to create a beloved village: a refuge that heals, nourishes, and renews us as Dharma companions, living in harmony and service to one another, to all beings, and to Mother Earth. In this pivotal time of global uncertainty, digital dependency, distress, and division, let us continue—with each mindful step, each breath, and each act of care—to manifest this village, this *làng quê*, for our teacher, our ancestors, our children, and all beings.

¹ Thích Nhất Hạnh, "True Transmission," *The Mindfulness Bell* 81 (2019): 6-15, <https://www.parallax.org/mindfulnessbell/article/true-transmission/>.

² Thích Nhất Hạnh, *In Love and Trust: Letters from a Zen Master* (Parallax Press, 2024), 131-143; Thiện Mỹ, *Saigon*, issues 29-71, 1964-1966. (While still in Vietnam during the war, Thầy was the editor in chief of this magazine in which he wrote many articles to help give hope and a direction to the Buddhist youths and the nation by focusing on building villages and empowering and organizing the people.)

Retreat at Deer Park Monastery June 2025 photo by Rob Walsh
Expanded article available on [mindfulnessbell.org](https://www.mindfulnessbell.org).

Brother Pháp Dung (Dharma Embrace) is a Vietnamese American monk in the Plum Village tradition, ordained by Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh in 1998. Before entering monastic life, he graduated from the University of Southern California's School of Architecture and worked as an architect and designer for four years. He received Lamp Transmission from Thầy in 2004 and served as abbot of Deer Park Monastery until 2010. He has been instrumental in designing meditation programs and retreats for children, teens, families, and young adults, and in planning the physical infrastructure, such as Dharma halls and residences, of Plum Village centers. He devotes himself to training young monastics from Western backgrounds, building residential communities of practice, and developing programs of mindful service such as the Happy Farm and the Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing.



The Being Peace Practice Centre

Teri West shares the interwoven nature of the long journey towards helping to found a practice centre in the UK and her path to becoming a Dharma teacher.



On February 27, 2025, in a church in Holborn, London, at a UK Sangha get-together, I met Ho-ting Fung and Ka-yee Chan, Ho-ting's mother. We had first met over fifteen years earlier on one of the wonderful all-age/family retreats, often led by monks and nuns, that were an annual UK Sangha event. Ho-ting is a couple of years older than my eldest grandson, who was six at the time.¹

One of the many great joys for me, having found my spiritual family, is to have had the opportunity to spend time with children of all ages, especially that sometimes unpopular group: teenagers. Ho-ting, who is now working for our project to establish a centre for Thầy's practice in the UK, still remembers a song from the retreat where we met! Holding annual retreats with a children's programme encourages lasting relationships, nourishes an appreciation of community, and hopefully fosters in young

people an aspiration to continue in the practice.

A while ago, I was thinking about whether I could find just one element of the human psyche/mindset that could be transformed to make living in a peaceful world more likely. There are many factors to take into account in discovering why we are experiencing such suffering in the world at present. The basic human need for community and cooperation seems to have been unmet, perhaps since the industrial revolution, and this has been compounded by successive governments that are out of touch with their electorate. Nourishing community and cooperation—between individuals, families, and societies, across countries and continents—is a way to happiness and the only way to address our impending extinction as a species. If people are happy, then there is no need to want more, take more, or distrust or fear others who are different in some way.



At the time, I was part of a team putting together publicity materials to promote our practice centre project, and we were mostly focussed on the environmental and spiritual teachings that would be offered there. Yes, environmental awareness and spiritual teachings are very important subjects for retreats and other events at the centre, but it dawned on me that perhaps the most important learning that people could take away with them and into their daily lives might be the happiness to be found in living and working together as a community.

Surely human beings are simply not designed to be 'self-sufficient' in spiritual, practical, or economic terms? For almost a year in the 1970s, I lived with a bunch of people in a harsh environment in northern UK, and I was astonished that the people in each household were working themselves to the bone trying to do it all. They each kept goats, bees, and chickens, and worked

hard in their individual gardens. There was no sharing of maintenance work or tools. This was long before I found the practice, but common sense told me that if one person cared for the goats, another for the chickens, and another took care of keeping tools in good shape, etc., they would all have more time for enjoying life! John Seymour had a lot to answer for!¹²

Another treasured gift that I know I receive from practising on this path is the opportunity to become friends with so many loving, humorous, and lighthearted practitioners from so many different walks of life. We are such a diverse community—and mysterious enough that the practice offers a lifetime's work to understand ourselves and others to enable living peacefully together.

We were over eighty community members in the church in Holborn, to celebrate that our work to establish a practice centre in the UK was

close to becoming a reality—no longer simply the vision that Thầy first shared with the UK Sangha (small, in those days!) during a retreat at an urban boys' boarding school in 1997.³

When I had listened to Thầy speaking about a centre in the UK, something had awoken very strongly in me. The practice and the UK community were new to me, but I decided that I could bring my small amount of experience in fundraising and the practice together by working towards establishing a centre, already named by Thầy as Being Peace. I didn't have the means to visit Plum Village, but here was a way to bring Plum Village closer to home.

That was a rare moment for me: I was able to make a decision based in love and hope. I had lived, on leaving home as a teenager, a long, chaotic, and often difficult life, never able to make proper plans based on sensible thinking, but simply bowling along from one crisis to another.

Feelings of guilt, remorse, and sadness began to plague me when, at the age of forty, my children aged sixteen and eighteen, I tried to make sense of everything that had happened to me, about what I felt were bad decisions concerning myself, others, and especially my children. I had been a single parent from the age of twenty-four, having given up trying to live with my husband's addiction to heroin.

By 1997, I had learned to practise compassion and understanding for myself, aware that choices we make appear to be the right ones at the time, and are often a reaction to our experiences. I was already aware of how cultivating compassion for myself was allowing me to be kinder, warmer, and friendlier to others.

In that somewhat grim school dining room that we were using as a meditation hall, my heart lifted. Here was a practical way of putting the practice to good use: I made a vow to Thầy in my heart there and then that I would dedicate my time and energy towards helping his vision become a reality, even if it didn't happen in my lifetime, which at that time looked possible, as our community was still small.

There was also the comforting knowledge

that working towards what could become a refuge of peace, healing, and transformation for all who came in the future would go some way towards making amends for any of my past actions that had been damaging for others.

Working for something that might not happen in my lifetime was a great practice in letting go of ideas on where a centre might be, how to raise the necessary funds, or how it would operate. When I shared my disappointment that we had not managed to establish a centre after several years of the project stopping and starting (though always inching forward), I felt only relief when Sister Annabel said, "Well, you know, it might take a hundred years!"

Being part of a team and offering 'work' as service to the community are ways in which to truly deepen practice. It's easy in cosy silence on a cushion in a meditation hall or sangha gathering surrounded by others doing the same. It's not so easy while working with others on organising retreats and other activities.

At that retreat long ago, just after Thầy made his request for a UK practice centre, a group of Order of Interbeing members stood up and announced that they would work on its establishment. I asked to join the group. The response was, 'You had better join the Order then, so that the community knows that you are committed.' I applied without any forethought or preparation, other than a couple of sentences describing my aspiration in doing so, and received The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings in 2000.

At the time of the gathering at the church in London in 2025, I had at least another year or so before I could become a *real* Dharma teacher, having received Lamp Transmission in 2016. (I once heard Thầy say that after receiving Lamp Transmission, it then takes at least ten years to become a real Dharma teacher.) I often marvel at how a simple twist of fate (an invitation from a friend with whom I was camping in France in the summer of 1988) led to our visiting Plum Village, and my becoming caught by Thầy's teaching and the book *Breathe, You Are Alive!* and an

ongoing thirty-five-year journey of self-discovery, with the Being Peace Practice Centre almost a reality, and what that might mean for my role as a Dharma teacher.

We hope to open the Being Peace Practice Centre, the first national centre for Thầy's teachings and Plum Village practice in the UK, with the support and blessing of the Plum Village monastic sangha, in early 2026. My hope is that family retreats will be an integral part of the annual programme. Children are our future. Retreats at our centre can show them the joy of living and working alongside others in peace and harmony.

You might like to join our Being Peace Practice Centre Sangha; we meet on a monthly basis for practice and discussion.⁴

I am looking forward to connecting or reconnecting with you. If you would like to stay updated, please visit the website: beingpeace.uk.

¹ *TheTJFool*, 2012, "6-yr old Zen Student and the Art of Whiteboard Writing" YouTube, <https://youtu.be/QCFSdZukK1Y>.

² John Seymour wrote a book about self-sufficiency published in the 1970s.

³ "Thay Calls for UK Dharma Centre," *The Mindfulness Bell* 19 (1997): 12, <https://www.parallax.org/mindfulnessbell/article/thay-calls-for-uk-dharma-centre>.

⁴ "The Being Peace Practice Centre Sangha," *Plum Village UK*, accessed May 22, 2025, <https://plumvillage.uk/event/the-being-peace-practice-centre-sangha-2/2025-05-25>.

Photos by Wayne Price (wpricephotography.co.uk)

You can read an earlier version of this article at mindfulnessbell.org.

Teri West/True Door of Virtue (she/her) was ordained as a Dharma teacher at Plum Village, France, in 2016. Teri has led a long and varied life and pursued many ways to bring home the veggie burgers as a single parent. In later years she has found great joy working as a storyteller, singer, and clown—she enjoys offering the Dharma in unlikely situations, such as from the cabaret stage and once even in a supermarket queue!



Stepping into Peace

Order of Interbeing member Reverend Eileen Mahoney deepens her experience of home while on tour with Blue Cliff monastics.

"Peace is every step," one of Thích Nhất Hạnh's calligraphies, became, for me, a spiritual pilgrimage and a blessing.

It was chosen as the theme for the northeast United States tour of the Blue Cliff Monastery monastics, which I helped organize. So why this particular calligraphy?

The tour's purpose was to strengthen the relationships among the monastics, regional practice centers, and sanghas, which are especially important in these challenging times.

Peace was not something I experienced much growing up. My mother was pill addicted and depressed, and my father was a busy, absent attorney/politician. There were often familial disagreements causing tension for days and always a political enemy to complain about at the dinner table. I didn't live in a war zone, never experienced gun violence, and so at the time did not consider my family situation to be lacking peace. Peace just wasn't in our vocabulary. So, as an adult, I

found peace to be rather elusive. It did not seem to apply to me.

When I met the practice, I had already spent years healing from past wounding, yet peace remained elusive. Thầy's teachings answered a deep need I didn't know I had: the longing for home, belonging, safety. I kept my need a well-hidden secret, especially from myself.

What was peace for me? I was afraid to really arrive home in my heart. I supported others to do so but somehow resisted it for myself. Thầy's tenderness and his teaching that peace in oneself is essential before you can help another: I knew that in my bones. The teachings on arriving home to oneself, Buddha nature, and transforming difficult feelings taught that peace was deeply connected to a sense of a loving home. And that home was not a physical location but home in oneself. During walking meditation, I often repeated, "I have arrived, I am home" to accompany my steps, but I never felt I had fully arrived.

... home was not
a physical location
but home in oneself.





This tour changed that.

Stop. Breathe. Feel. Allow. That became my practice for the tour as I unwittingly walked (strode, stepped) deeper into peace.

On this tour I was absorbed into the monastic sangha. Little did I know that, in a way, I had worked my whole life to be in this experience/experiment of belonging.

We flowed as a river. Even though I was the only layperson, I was accepted for just who I was. I could be myself. I was full of love, laughter, and delight at the many lovely, quirky things that occurred: two bald monks in brown robes standing in the street near a curb waving off cars to save me a parking place; a brother proudly showing us his extracted tooth; a sister going into the field to feed apples to the horses; warm greetings at every visit, every sangha, every "step."

What happened to me on this tour? I was embraced by the sangha, and my heart opened

and was transformed. I came home, home to myself, able to let go of my habit energy of withholding myself.

I realized this only in retrospect. Even as I enjoyed the flow of the overall experience, I was unaware of its profound growing impact on me.

I felt such love for each person, each so different and yet sharing with me, each other, and all whom we met, their common river of being and commitment to alleviating suffering in the world.

One morning in Vermont (at what used to be Maple Forest Monastery), we arrived at a Japanese tea house, built for Thầy years ago.

It sat angled on a lovely, irregularly shaped pond, silhouetted by sugar maples with green, yellow, and orange leaves dancing in the autumn breeze. I removed my shoes and approached several monastics who were already seated on the dock, sipping tea.

One brother always had his tea with him. He had a very simple, easy way to carry it, with

a thermos of hot water and four tea cups, ready to create a mini tea ceremony at any moment. He was also always ready to offer a cup to a new arrival, always room for one more. Generosity was part of his spirit.

On one walk, I thought I wanted to be alone, but discovered this way of being held with and by others felt different, safe and good. Was something shifting in me?

Everything seemed more alive, especially me! I noticed the subtle colors, shapes, and lines of stone walls, the brilliant colors of leaves shimmering in the breeze. I marveled at the beauty of it all, filled with gratitude to be present.

How did I get here? We had an idea and I said yes. I began this project as a service to the sangha but for me, the tour had evolved into a spiritual pilgrimage. Isn't that often the case? In service, don't we grow more, transform more than what we offer?

As I became more and more attuned to my openness, I trusted a growing sense of solidity and rootedness, not only in the earth but also in my heart, my being. Concurrently, I experienced a spaciousness that blended into the clouds and the blue sky. I was grounded and happy. I felt confident. I felt loved. I felt peace, real peace.

Peace is, in part, the experience of allowing yourself to risk. Had I not said yes, I would not have had the opportunity to transform these

old energies. After years of practice, I am finally appreciating the extraordinary experience of being carried by a sangha, going as a river, allowing myself to relax, to belong, to allow. Wow. To finally, after all this time, allow myself to belong and come truly home.

So what is peace for me? I am still living into that question. I know that it is trusting yourself, trusting sangha, feeling as though you belong. The tour allowed me to finally know it deeply for the first time.

Before, I didn't know what I didn't know.

It's been some weeks since the end of the tour and while the "glow" has worn off a bit, I still experience a deepened sense of self (and non-self) and peaceful moments. My practice has deepened. I am breathing more easily, openly, and peacefully; relaxing into myself and life more and enjoying sangha more than ever.

Peace is every step. My ongoing practice is to remember it. And share it.

Photos of the Blue Cliff monastic tour courtesy of the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation

Reverend Eileen Mahoney/True Radiant Family (she/her) has been a student of Thích Nhất Hạnh since 2016 and was ordained as an Order of Interbeing member in 2019. She practices with the Berkshire Mountain Laurel Sangha in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, US. She is a former lobbyist whose lifelong spiritual practice now informs her work combining Thầy's teachings with creativity and the arts to help individuals and groups to transform their suffering in workshops and retreats. Eileen is a member of the TNHF Board and Chairperson of the Development Committee.



A Love Letter from Malaysia

Order of Interbeing member Will Chua finds a way
of interbeing inspired by giving, living simply,
growing food with others, and tenderness.

1 May 2025

Dear Respected Thầy,
Dear Beloved Community,

Hope this finds you smiling and at ease. Aren't these great moments of practice, and moments of great practice for us all?

REALITIES OF A LAY PRACTITIONER

It has been thirteen years since the river of Plum Village flowed into my being, healing a broken heart and battered life. Now, reflecting on the theme of community building in divisive times, one realization comes immediately to mind: being a lay practitioner is not easy!

Fulfilling perhaps, but not easy, for at least three reasons:

1. I am part of multiple communities that do not really overlap, needing energy and attention, often at the same time!
2. Each community is often divided along multiple lines: views, beliefs, culture, religion, background, status, etc. The divisions, even if tolerable, can be draining and require energy and practice. Most people I interact with have not committed to the Mindfulness Trainings or Six Harmonies!
3. I find myself having to constantly switch between "practice" and "participate" in these communities, sometimes on the fly. There are no agreed daily practice schedules or sharing circle guidelines!

Here, I am still very much in love and involved with Joyful Garden Sangha Singapore. We are a growing fifteen-year-old spiritual family with dedicated caretakers, mentored by wonderful Dharma teachers, filled with many opportunities for practice, from daily morning sits to weekly group practices, from monthly Days of Mindfulness to yearly retreats.

Energetically, however, the local sangha is also not always a place of refuge. Despite much involvement, time with the sangha remains a small part of my waking hours, compared to interaction with family, farm, and friend circles. Sometimes when difficulties arise in the sangha (and there are quite a few), practice sessions are not always nourishing. Also, in order to support and hold space when newer people come to the sangha with deep suffering, we often have to be in touch with other resources that are available in our personal practice outside the sangha, or simply take a break.

As Sister Lương Nghiêm once clearly pointed out to us in a Dharma teaching, "As an OI (Order of Interbeing) member, how can you have the capacity and energy to show up and serve the sangha, when you don't have enough peace at home and at work?"

So, what helps outside of sangha? I am feeling grateful for this chance to reflect and share.

A SIMPLE LIFE OF GIVING

I received The Five Mindfulness Trainings at the European Institute of Applied Buddhism (EIAB) in 2013 with the lineage name Pāramitā Hridaya, Crossing to the Other Shore of the Heart. Sister True Dedication looked at me with a cheeky smile and said, "Dear Will, you have to practice not only The Five Mindfulness Trainings, but the Six Pāramitās too. Good luck!"

Thầy's words on *Dāna Pāramitā*, the perfection of giving, came alive in my heart as I embarked on a new livelihood as a farmer:





"There is a plant, well-known in Asia—it is a member of the onion family, and it is delicious in soup, fried rice and omelets—that grows back in less than twenty-four hours every time you cut it. And the more you cut it, the bigger and stronger it grows. This plant represents dāna pāramitā. We don't keep anything for ourselves. We only want to give. When we give, the other person might become happy, but it is certain that we become happy."

So I gave it a shot. For the last thirteen years, I have practiced never asking for a salary or anything else in return for my time and energy, whether it is working on our community farms, helping out family and friends, or in the sangha. Every day, I try to:

1. Connect with gratitude by maintaining awareness of all that is gifted in the present moment unconditionally, all the conditions I already have.
2. Respond to this gratitude by doing my best to gift my time, energy, and resources with understanding, whether at home, at work, or in third spaces. And when in doubt, just give first, even if it is a small jar of turmeric or a small prayer for wellness!
3. Receive wholeheartedly any gifts offered for my needs, nourishing more gratitude.
4. Repeat steps 1 to 3.

Thirteen years on, and wow, I am still here! Every day, there is food to eat, everywhere there are beds to sleep on, and in every corner there are friendships, kinships. My bank account has never gotten rich, but it has never been empty. Internally, there is a deeper trust in Life. Externally, there is a deeper trust in the

kindness of others. If we consider that on average all the cells in our body are renewed every seven years, then every cell in my body has been the result of someone's generosity, almost twice over!

More importantly, I find that whenever there is a misunderstanding among loved ones, tension in views amongst farm colleagues, or trouble in the sangha, there is a deep well of Trust to draw from, given this way of living. Firewood for winter, as Thầy would say. Even in the midst of frustration, people give our relationship a chance; connections remain warm enough for dialogue.

How many times has Thầy invited us to live a simple life? When I received this teaching, I always thought that I first had to simplify my life in order to have time and space to give, to serve. Now I realize this is only partly right. Yes, a simple life gives us more time and space to give, but a life of giving also creates conditions for a simple life. A simple life and giving inter-are. More and more, I feel safer without many possessions. Mutual care is activated, I entrust my life to the relationships I am in, and they entrust themselves to me.

The practice of true giving also constantly invites us to understand how to give skilfully and appropriately, to keep our heart sensitive and listening. This understanding sparks gratitude instead of guilt, and keeps the fire of compassion alive in our heart—bringing about contentment and meaning, more patience, and the need for less. I understand more deeply now why Thầy also taught:

"If you are capable of lessening the suffering around you, then you are also capable of living a simple life."²



A simple life of giving, therefore, continues to be a living question, a daily practice, a constant awareness, as I engage in the communities around me. Trust spirally grows. Trust in Life, trust in a life that is useful, trust in the kindness of others, and trust in an open heart in times of trouble. I pray conditions continue to be favorable for me, and for you too.

GROWING A FOOD FOREST WITH FRIENDS FROM DIFFERENT FAITHS

I live in Malaysia, where 64% of the people are Muslim. Five years ago, during COVID, some friends and I embarked on A Little Wild, a 200-year project to heal and transform 138 acres of degraded oil palm land into a tropical food forest, for our community and for Mother Earth. Today, our farm community includes devout Muslims, Christians, free thinkers, and Plum Village practitioners from all kinds of backgrounds.

Even on a project as sacred as this, our diverse backgrounds bring friction. Power versus consensus. Reverence for Life versus animal sacrifice. Exclusive versus inclusive. Self-sufficiency versus Interbeing. Original Sin versus Buddha Nature. Hope versus despair. The role of women. All our different views make their way, often unconsciously, into everyday decision-making, conversations with people, and attitudes, causing misunderstanding, tension, and sometimes hurt.

There are times of difficulty when I find myself thinking, “I wish everyone was a Plum Village practitioner!” But it does not take long to see that thinking this way creates more, not less, division and suffering, inside and around. Rather, what has really helped keep our community harmonious enough, happy enough, on this long tough road of regenerative farming, is the energy of insight.

An insight, transmitted by Thầy, surfaced one day during a deep discussion about belief in God. I found myself sharing, emotionally, with our Muslim cofounder: “My only wish, brother, is that my presence on the farm will contribute in small ways to you being a better Muslim, and for your presence to help me be a better person. Same for Christian siblings and friends of other faiths.”

There was a sense of peace and ease in the circle, which I believe our bodies remember. Ever since, reminding each other of this, has created good conditions for safety, trust, and freedom as we work together.

Another insight was transmitted by Mother Earth. A few years back, while I was in a mood of reflection on the farm, these words came to heart: Every land’s dream is to be a forest.

We are not just individuals. We are not just part of a human community. We are living, breathing organs in a macro-organism, a macro-organism dreaming to realize its full potential: to be a thriving tropical forest again, creating and supporting all life.

Our true sangha is a big family of microbes, insects, plants, animals, humans, minerals, and mystery—interwoven and interbeing towards this dream of increasing Life, while always “announcing our place in the family of things,” as Mary Oliver said.³

This insight, this deep aspiration, is now on our farm website and is mentioned on our farm tours, guiding our hearts through tougher times. We can feel the energy of this insight even on degraded land: every day, another being becomes compost, another bird brings seed, another grass leaf shoots up to harvest the sun and slow

the rain. Every time we are called to plant a new tree, or prune a dead branch to cover the soil, joy awakens: joy in knowing our place in the family of things, the joy of fulfilment, of belonging to a path leading to a forest. This joy keeps us together.

How precious, in these times, to be a multifaith community regenerating our Forest Body together.

The energy of insight awakens a collective heart, and sustains collective action, until another one manifests. With each one, we dream and lean more into the Ultimate, while feeding the cats, cutting the grass, and fixing a water pipe. Aren't we lucky to have inherited so many insights from Thầy, and to have a practice that encourages us to germinate our own?

TONE OF VOICE

At home, this is also my thirteenth year of choosing to situate a more spiritual life close to my aging mum, family members, and old friends. Imagine a warm community, but also loud, contentious, carnivorous, believing in making money and enjoying life through all levels of consumption. Every day, I continue to have a chance to face resistance in my heart: an invitation to another family seafood dinner, family obligations to Taoist rites, visits to the casino, giving iPads to the children, mahjong sessions, constant news reports on the living room TV, and so on. The balance between belonging and boundary can be hard to keep.

One day a few years back, after an argument with my mum, I hid in my room, angry at my anger. After sending out a phone message of apology to her, I sat on my cushion, wondering why I was still capable of acting out like that.

A question then came to heart: How am I talking to myself now? What is the tone of voice?

I picked up my phone, went to tnhaudio.org, and randomly clicked on one of Thầy's talks. It was a Q&A session, and a lay sister was asking him about her difficulties with her husband. As Thầy began to speak, I started crying uncontrollably, my heart feeling a deep warm relief. I had no idea what he said exactly, but I remember feeling his tone, that gentleness and warmth. I remember hearing a rhythm of speaking, a repetition of the phrase, "in such a way." Can you still breathe in such a way, can you still drink tea in such a way?

Dear sangha, how many times have Thầy and many of our Dharma teachers invited us with this phrase *in such a way*? To let go of the personal content, and to rest in the process of loving awareness, a way of being, towards all that unfolds in the moment?

Every morning in the house since then, I've happily taken over from my mum our family Taoist ritual of praying to the Sky and Earth Gods. At the balcony, I breathe and look at the sky, thanking Mother Earth and Father Sun, before offering an incense on the Sky God altar. Going inside, I offer an incense to the left ancestral altar, where I have printed out pictures of my late father and grandparents. I offer another incense on the right altar, with pictures of my maternal grandparents. I offer the final incense in the middle, where Mum has allowed me to place a small Buddha statue, a small picture of Thầy, and a crystal engraving of the Heart Sutra from my late godmother. I touch the picture of Dad, then Grandma, recite the opening gatha on bowing, then kneel down and touch the earth three times to the Three Jewels. What was once

a meaningless, obligatory ritual comes alive. Mum is happy, I am happy, the day becomes new.

Dear sangha, thank you so much for reading. I wish to end this surprisingly long letter to you now, with the words of a simple song that came from that day. I pray that wherever we find ourselves, we are able to think, speak, and act in such a way that all situations become alive with understanding and love, with the perfume of Plum Village, continuing the gentle spirit of our teachers.

In Such a Way

Breathe, in such a way,
We come back home, to the here and now.
Breathe, in such a way,
Our body can rest, and heal again.

Walk, in such a way,
Every step, is kissing the Earth.
Walk, in such a way,
Every step, says Yes to Life.

Love, in such a way,
The one we love, feels warm and free.
Love, in such a way,
We understand, our interbeing.

Smile, in such a way,
Curiously touch, the wonders of life
Smile, in such a way,
Gently embrace, our joy and pain.

Speak, in such a way,
Flowers bloom, in every heart.
Listen, in such a way,
Like receiving a child, with open arms.

Love, in such a way,
The one we love, feels warm and free.
Love, in such a way,
We understand, our interbeing.

In love and trust,
Will

P.S. If you would like to hear a song version, I believe there is a recording on the Stream Entering Monastery's YouTube channel. Or please write to me at khisui@gmail.com. I would love to connect.

¹ *Thích Nhất Hạnh*, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998), 194.

² *Plum Village App*, 2024, "Meaningful Life | Teaching by Thich Nhat Hanh" YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAR55vBpd0Q>.

³ *Mary Oliver*, "Wild Geese," *Devotions: the Selected Poems of Mary Oliver* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 347.

Photos on pages 18 and 23 by Samuel Goh

Photo on page 19 by Qingxiu Lin



Will Chua/True Fearlessness resides in Johor Bahru, Malaysia, and practices with Joyful Garden Sangha Singapore and Joyfully Together Sangha Malaysia. His lifestyle now can be summarized as half farmer, half monk. Before he became a regenerative farmer, his background was in engineering and public policy. Currently, his favorite practice is following the breath from beginning to end, with a smile.



Friends on the Path: Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century

Thích Nhất Hạnh's teachings on sangha-building, the spirit of togetherness, safety, despair, and conflict between nations, are just as true now as when he gave Dharma talks in Plum Village, December 2001.

Despair is a great temptation of our century. Whether you are a political leader, a businessperson, a social worker, a teacher, or a parent, everyone needs to be reminded that the blue sky is still there for us. We should not allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by despair. That is why we need a sangha; a sangha can help us from sinking into despair. Sangha-building is the most important practice—the most important action—of our century. How can the twenty-first century be a century of spirituality if we do not take up the work of sangha-building?

...

We suffered tremendously during the twentieth century. Individualism prevailed. Families were broken up, society was deeply divided. That is why if the twenty-first century is to be a spiritual century, it should be built by the spirit of togetherness, where we do things together, we do everything together. When you live in a community, you learn how to see the Sangha body, the *Sanghakaya*, as your own body.

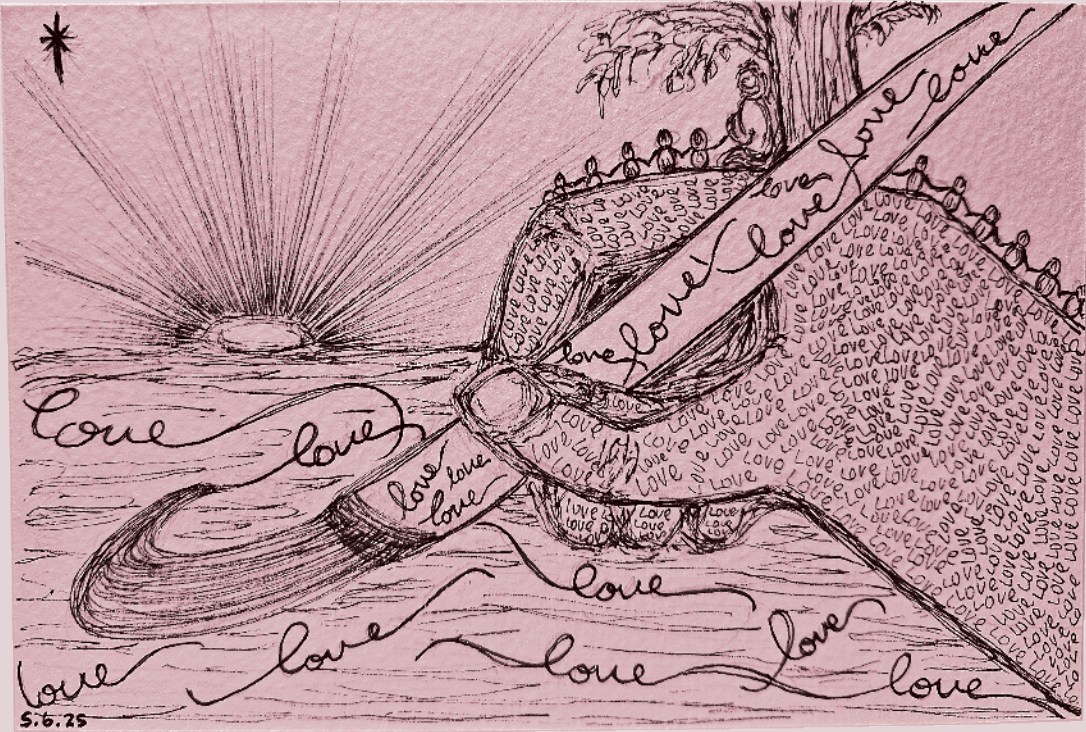
When the king of Koshala looked at the Buddha's sangha, he saw the Buddha. Now we should be able to do the same when we look at the *Buddhasangha*, we should see elements of the Buddha: the elements of lovingkindness, compassion, understanding, and nondiscrimination. Then looking at the sangha, people will have trust; they won't lose themselves in despair.

Whether we live in Amsterdam, London, Munich, or New York, it is our role to build a sangha. We need each other to practice solidity, freedom, and compassion, and with our practice we can remind people in our society that there is always hope, the blue sky is always there, the Kingdom of Heaven is always at hand. We should walk and breathe in such a way that the Kingdom of Heaven, the Pure Land of the Buddha, is available in every step, in every breath. This is what we should do.

Do not say that the teaching of Buddha is too difficult. No, it is not. In fact, the teaching is simple. Every one of us, whether young or less young, can practice this simple teaching: "I have arrived, I am home." And when we are able to apply that to our daily life, we will not run anymore. Then every minute of our life can help generate the energy of solidity, peace, and compassion.

If we want to be safe, we have to build safety. What do we build to be safe? Not a fortress, not bombs or airplanes. The United States of America is very powerful in terms of armies and weapons, but the people living in America do not feel safe. Many people are thinking of safety in terms of weapons and armies, but even with a powerful army and a stock of weapons, there are moments when the American people feel very frightened, very vulnerable. So there must be some other kind of practice we can take refuge in, another way to

If you are a journalist, if you are a writer,
if you are a professor, if you are a parent,
it is time for you to speak out
and make known what you want,
what the world needs,
and promise that you will help.



be safe. We can learn how to build safety with our in-breath and our out-breath, with our steps, with the way we act or react, with a smile or a word, with our effort to restore communication.

You cannot feel safe with the person who lives with you if you cannot communicate with him or her. You cannot feel safe when the other person does not look at you with sympathy, when you are not capable of looking at him or her with compassion. Safety can be built with your way of looking, your way of smiling, with your way of walking. It can build confidence. Show the other person that you are truly not harmful, that he is safe in your presence, in the way you think, the way you breathe, smile, and walk. Everything you do is peaceful. So by expressing your peace, your compassion, the other person feels very safe. And when the other person feels safe, you are safe. Safety is not an individual matter.

A country cannot be safe if it doesn't do something to help other countries feel safe, too. We cannot just think of our own safety—because safety is not an individual matter. We have to think

of the safety of other groups of people, of other nations, too. If the United States wants to have safety, then they have to take care of the safety of the people of other nations. If Great Britain wants safety, then people there have to think of the safety of other groups of people. The problem of terrorism should not be the concern of one nation, or a few nations. It should be the concern of all nations, namely, it should be the concern of the sangha of all nations.

Any one of us can be victims of violence or terrorism. Nobody can say, "I am safe, I am special, my country is safe." Therefore we have to do something for safety to become a reality. We have seen clearly that violence and weapons are not the means for safety. Now we have to use other means to build safety. Maybe the first thing for us to do is to tell the other person, "Dear friend, I know that you want to live in safety. I do too. Why don't we work together in order to ensure safety for both of us?" This is a very simple thing to do, but why can't people do it? Communication is the key to all of this. We claim that this is an era of

communication, where there are so many sophisticated means to communicate, and yet it is very difficult for individuals, for groups of people, or for nations to communicate with each other. We stop speaking to each other, and instead of using our language, we use guns and explosives. This is the case in the Middle East.

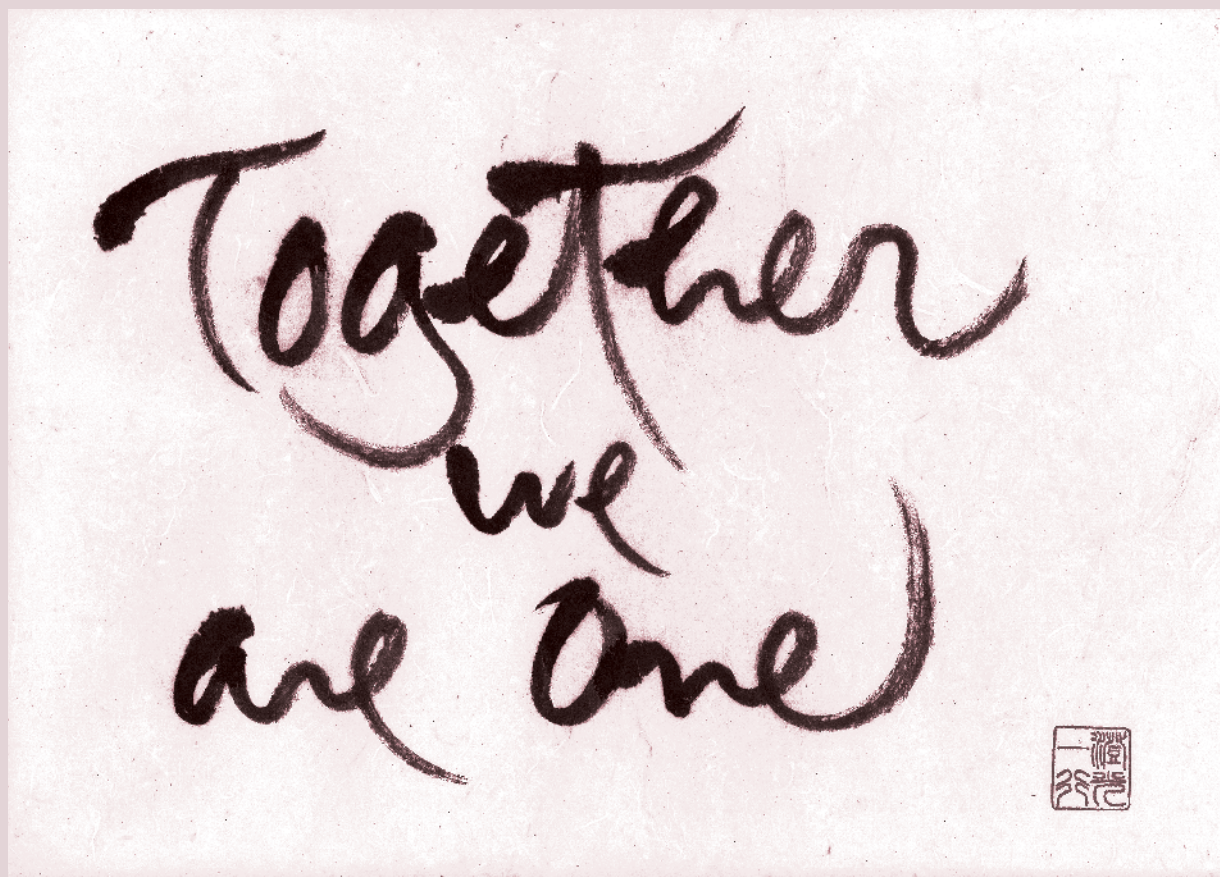
We have to learn how to communicate again. We need to learn how to show the other party that we are harmless, that they don't have to be afraid of us. When we are able to show that we are not harmful, the other person will trust us and collaborate with us.

In Asian countries, when we meet each other, we bow with our hands in the lotus flower position; in the West when people meet each other, they offer their hands. The practice of shaking hands originated in olden times, when people were afraid of each other. Every time they would meet each other, they would show their hands so it was clear they weren't carrying any weapon. "Dear friend, I have no weapons. See, touch for

yourself." That is the origin of the handshaking practice. Now we have to do the same kind of thing. "Dear friends, I am not harmful. You can touch me, there is no weapon hidden here."

We need some simple kind of practice like that in the beginning to build trust. And with trust, dialogue will be possible and we can help each other build safety for everyone. We all need safety. Not only the African people need safety, the people of the United States need safety, the British people need safety, the French people need safety, all of us need safety. If we don't do something, we will arrive at a point where we cannot talk to each other anymore, and we will have to use the language of guns. That is despair itself.

During the visit of our friends from Palestine and Israel to Plum Village this summer, I asked them whether they would accept an international peacekeeping force in the area to stop the violence and to work out solutions for both sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians. Our Israeli friends from this particular group said they cannot trust



anyone at this time; they have a lot of suspicion. They do not trust the United Nations or the international peacekeeping force. Fear and suspicion go together.

The conflict between Palestinians and Israelis is the pain not only of these two groups of people, but of the whole of humanity, humanity as a Sangha. So if the UN were to become a true sangha and play the role of embracing that painful spot of the Earth, the very heart of the pain, and the people in that area allowed themselves to be embraced by the sangha body, then they would listen to the wisdom of the sangha of all nations. They would accept the proposals and the practices that the sangha of all nations prescribed for them. But there is a resistance. Many do not have faith in the sangha of all nations.

The tension between India and Pakistan is another painful spot on the body of the Earth. But if both nations surrender to the sangha body and listen to the advice and prescriptions of the sangha body, then the crisis will be transformed very quickly. So, there is an urgent need that the United Nations become a real sangha of nations.

How can we make the United Nations into a real sangha of nations as it was intended when we don't really trust our sangha body? Some nations are trying to make the United Nations into an instrument to serve their own national interests—this is what the United States and many other superpowers are doing. Our sangha body should be a real sangha body, and this should be discussed in a plenary session of the United Nations.

When there is trouble within any individual state, then the whole sangha comes and helps. If there is a member of the sangha who has difficulties, then the whole sangha has to take care of this member, because it is a part of the body. If there is a conflict between two members of the sangha, it is not their problem alone, it is a problem for the whole sangha. It is a lot easier to solve problems in the sangha because we have a sangha body and sangha eyes. Sangha eyes are always clearer than eyes of an individual, so the individual members of the sangha have to

surrender to the sangha and learn how to make use of the sangha eyes in order to look at the whole situation.

National interests go against the spirit of sangha. In a real sangha, you cannot operate on your ego; you have to accept the sangha body as your body. You have to learn how to use the sangha eyes as your eyes, and you have to learn how to profit from the wisdom of the sangha. The collective wisdom and insight of a real sangha are much more reliable than your own wisdom or insight.

So if the United Nations is to become a true sangha body, then the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians should be taken care of by the sangha eyes of the United Nations. We cannot allow things to continue the way they are. Every day bombs explode, every day people die. The United Nations sangha body could go there right now and take care of this problem.

People don't believe in the United Nations as a true sangha because the United Nations has not yet become one. But we can very well start from there. It is better than not having the United Nations at all. If the United Nations became a real sangha body, the Security Council would become a true instrument and it would be able to help settle conflict and tension everywhere in the world. The entire United Nations sangha body could come together with Pakistan and India and tell them that they are friends, they are brothers and sisters, and ask them to please hold hands with each other and serve the sangha body. Instead of fighting with each other, they should be encouraged to become allies and serve the common cause, the cause of peace and stability in the world. It is possible that Pakistan and India, motivated by the desire to help, would become friends instead of being enemies. The same thing is true with Palestine and Israel.

That is sangha-building in the twenty-first century. If you are a journalist, if you are a writer, if you are a professor, if you are a parent, it is time for you to speak out and make known what you want, what the world needs, and promise that you will help. Those of you who have experience in your

practice and are already sangha-builders, speak out in order to build a sangha in your department, in your city hall, your village, your city, your parliament, and then finally we can propose that the United Nations should become a true sangha of nations.

Sangha-building has to be done at every level—local, national, and international. Sangha is our hope. Our national assemblies and senates should become our sanghas, where loving speech and deep listening are practiced. The United Nations General Assembly should also be a sangha, where people learn to listen to each other as brothers and sisters. We should stop acting in the name of our so-called national interests.

If the twenty-first century is to become a century of spirituality at all, it depends on our capacity of sangha-building. We need each other, we need to come together to pool our wisdom, our insight, and our compassion to build a lasting peace in

the world. We should give up our personal and national interests, and think of the Earth as our true home, a home for all of us. To bring the spiritual dimension to your daily life, to your social, political, and economic life—that is your practice.

It is very clear that Jesus had that intention. It is very clear that the Buddha had this intention, too. And for those of us who come from the background of Christianity and Buddhism, we should be aware that our spiritual ancestors had that intention. We should be able to display the light of wisdom and come together in order to create hope, and to prevent society and the younger generation from sinking into despair.

This is an excerpt from Friends on the Path: Living Spiritual Communities by Thích Nhất Hạnh, published by Parallax Press.

Photos courtesy of the monastic sangha

Artwork by Susan Baxley

Calligraphy by Thích Nhất Hạnh



Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh is one of the most revered and influential teachers in the world today. Born in Vietnam in 1926, he became a Zen Buddhist monk at the age of sixteen. Over seven decades of teaching, he published more than one hundred titles on meditation, mindfulness, and Engaged Buddhism, as well as poems, children's stories, and commentaries on ancient Buddhist texts. After his exile from Vietnam in 1966, he became a pioneer in bringing Buddhism to the West. He founded the Plum Village tradition of meditation practice, which today has ten monasteries and dozens of practice centers in the United States, Asia, Australia, and Europe, as well as more than 1,500 local mindfulness practice communities. He built a thriving community of over seven hundred monks and nuns worldwide, who, together with his tens of thousands of lay students, apply his teachings on mindfulness, peacemaking, and community-building in schools, workplaces, prisons, politics, and businesses throughout the world. Our beloved teacher passed away peacefully on January 22, 2022, at Từ Hiếu Temple in Huế, Vietnam, at the age of ninety-five.

Resist, Maladjust, Defy

**Dharma Teacher Marisela Gomez on how
turning the upside-down world right side up
requires us to resist, maladjust to, and defy
the normalization of greed, hatred, and delusion**

I hesitate to begin with the words “these are chaotic times ...”. More accurate might be: chaotic times are escalating. While the executive and legislative branches of the United States government have jumped into the tyranny soup, the judicial branch seems to be trying to pause the massive onslaught of violence against humanity.

Regardless of the degree of chaos, we have the tools to absorb and diffuse the suffering of these times. We have many teachings and actions of wise people, present and past, that directly and indirectly instruct us on how to resist, maladjust to, and defy the current manifestations of greed, hatred, and delusion. In doing so, we act from Right View by seeing the causes of conditions in each moment without turning away from the difficult or clinging to the pleasant.¹ Right View also facilitates a deep understanding that allows us to act from love. When we practice and cultivate Right View, we immediately turn the upside-down world right side up by seeing the roots of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness and choosing how we will live this life, choosing love.

RESISTING

Resisting is not futile. It is necessary. We have been resisting for a while now. All of us who practice mindfulness have been resisting this upside-down world. Those of us who gather together to practice in community, who build sanghas or communities of practice, continue to resist. The Venerable *Thầy*, our teacher Thích Nhất Hạnh—Zen Buddhist monk, author, and peace activist—lived and practiced through the American War in Vietnam. His life shows us how to resist war, an unwholesome manifestation of greed, hatred, and militarism. When *Thầy* was exiled from Vietnam for resisting the tyranny of war enacted through the United States government and citizens, enabled by nations like China and the Soviet Union with political and military aid, he continued to resist by building sanghas, communities of resistance. *Thầy* wrote: “The purpose of resistance, here, is to seek the healing of yourself in order to be able to see clearly.”² *Thầy*’s conception of sanghas as resistance has spread across the globe through monastic and lay communities in the UK, Africa, Europe, the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central America, South America, the Caribbean, Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Japan, Korea, India, and other parts of the East.



The precepts of Buddhism, taught by Thích Nhất Hạnh as The Five Mindfulness Trainings, are easily adapted into daily life. The commentary on these Trainings, "Contemplations on The Five Mindfulness Trainings,"³ builds on the original Five Mindfulness Trainings and helps us interpret them across diverse populations. Together, the Trainings guide us to resist: killing; stealing and social injustices; sexual misconduct; lying and violent speech; and intoxication. When we practice the Mindfulness Trainings, we build compassion and understanding; we go against the normalization of the unwholesome actions evident today in the US and worldwide.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings guide us to practice with the antidotes to unwholesome action: reverence for life; generosity and non-exploitation; responsible sexual behavior; deep listening and loving speech for honest communication and reconciliation; and mindful consumption. Living our lives according to these mindfulness guidelines, we resist the behaviors that maintain conflict and hatred in our daily lives and that can lead to social and economic exploitation, injustice, and war and fighting in our households, between communities, and between nations. Mindfulness allows us to notice when we have wrong views of ourselves so we can resist the fragmentation within ourselves and the self-hatred many of us live with, especially people of color and other marginalized groups.

These wrong views cultivate the misperception that others are separate from ourselves. Often in these forms of marginalization, we live as devalued members of society relative to mainstream groups, which are normalized and perceived as superior. By living our lives according to guiding posts like The Five Mindfulness Trainings, we resist the normalized culture of greed, hatred, and discrimination, all of which are fueled by ignorance. By resisting these normalized cultures, we grow the love and kindness necessary for us to be able to live together, even when we are different from each other and don't fully understand each other. We grow our understanding (Right View) that we are interconnected with each other, despite our differences. We learn to trust our ability to love and grow our hearts across human-made and human-named divisions. We extend ourselves just a little each time; we contest and disentangle the socialized constructs telling us to hate those different from us, to compete for fame and fortune, to believe we can actually find permanent happiness and escape illness, old age, and death. By rebuilding communities rooted in Right View, we begin to turn the world right side up.

MALADJUSTING

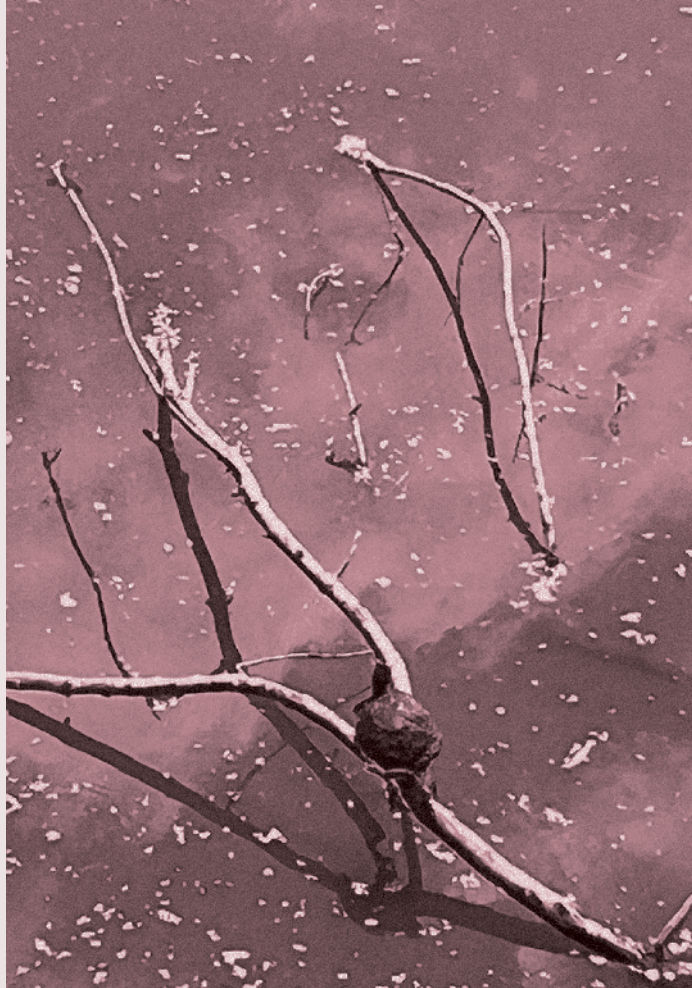
The upside-down world is a product of living a deluded life, of adjusting to the normalized wrong views we have been conditioned with since birth. Since birth, these views have been systematically watered by social and economic structures built on greed and hatred and rooted in ignorance. These structures insist we conform to be a “good” citizen.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called for us to resist these structures and their production of the three evils of materialism, militarism, and racism. He called for us to maladjust to a society that requires us to adjust to such evils: “... in an age amazingly adjusted to war I call upon you to be maladjusted. In an age amazingly adjusted to imperialism and colonialism I call upon you to be maladjusted. In an age amazingly adjusted to hate and malice I call upon you to be maladjusted. My plea to you in America is to be maladjusted.”⁴ Today, as the United States veers into an authoritarian rule, what might Dr. King say? Given that the same evils he spoke of sixty years ago persist, it's hard to imagine him not calling on us to continue to maladjust to a society digesting and proliferating daily acts of greed, violence, and discrimination in all forms.

Dr. King also suggested that it was hard to be a Christian in an un-Christian world. He referred to the difficulty of living in a world steeped in hatred and violence and how hard it is to resist these forces by standing up to the government and those who contribute to structures of evil. Dr. King believed in building communities of love—Beloved Communities, communities of resistance. Beloved Communities resist and do not adjust to societies that promote hatred, discrimination, division, imperialism, and militarism.

What does this look like? Being able to touch the calm and beauty in ourselves daily, each of us, begins to rebuild a world of people finding love right here and now. These daily acts of self-nourishment—of “I am enough just as I am,” nurtured by a pause that reminds us of this truth—are a path of rebuilding. We rebuild inside first and become Beloved. With this type of foundation, we are equipped to resist the pervasive culture that pushes us in the direction of separation, consumption, and competition. Building this solid foundation allows us to connect to people, animals, and plant life around us, in our homes, practice centers, a zoning hearing, a park, our workplace, on the street, on the bus, in all our communities. Wherever we engage, we build Beloved Communities. We may move down the street and if our energy is one of non-separation, of Beloved, we

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build Beloved Community with the person sleeping on the sidewalk. In small and large circles, we bring this energy of awareness of our interbeing nature by using words to bring peace and understanding. We act with clarity and alignment with wholesomeness, whether we agree or disagree, because we are Beloved. We rebuild the world around us one thought, one word, one action at a time to build Beloved Communities everywhere. Thầy called on us to do just this through sangha building as an example of rebuilding the world. Sanghas become Beloved Communities when they “resist[] the speed, violence, and unwholesome ways of living that are prevalent in our society.”⁵

DEFYING

If we do not resist, we conform to the speed, violence, and unwholesome ways that continue to perpetuate personalities and harmful habits like those of the current “leaders” in the United States and beyond. We continue to normalize this upside-down world. Many practicing Christians also understand the world we currently inhabit to be an upside-down world and practice spirituality to change this. To do this, to make the world right side up, and live as practicing Buddhists and Christians and people of other spiritual denominations, we must defy. As we do so, we clearly see the delusion that abounds in a non-spiritual world. In order to cultivate the spiritual and moral principles of love and spiritual friendship that Thầy and Dr. King spoke to, we must resist the pace of life, a pace that pressures us (knowingly and unknowingly) to conform to the norms of a society that systematically propagates structures of violence, competition, and imperialism.

The society we are experiencing today in the United States, a country on the brink of fascism, did not come to be on January 20, 2025 when the 47th president of the United States was sworn into office. We in the United States have been building a path to where we find ourselves now. We have conformed to a society and benefited from its history of exploitation of those without power. When it did not affect

us directly, and at times when it did, we did not say “no.” Generationally, many of us did not say “no” to the numerous government policies that systematized exploitation of people and land for centuries, reaching back to the founding of the United States on Turtle Island.

Dr. Sunita Sah’s research in the field of psychology shows us that many of us are unable to enact a “no” even in situations that go against our values.⁶ She introduces a definition of “defy” that may help us all enact our “no”: “to act in accordance with your true values when there is power to do otherwise.”⁷ Such a definition may move us forward to affirm our values and understand that enacting a “no” or “defying” is the right thing to do—after we have evaluated the appropriate time and beneficial effect. She further reports that when we assume responsibility for a person or situation, we are more likely to defy any authority that pushes us to conform to behaviors against our values.

In many stories of the Buddha teaching new and existing disciples, the listener is quoted as saying: “... [he has] made the Dharma clear in many ways, as though he were turning upright what had been overthrown, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark so those with good eyesight can see forms....”⁸ The insinuation here is that the teachings and practices of Buddhism, like Christianity, help us to see clearly what is ours to do to make the world a better place for us and future generations.⁹ This requires defying the norms that allow each generation to be inculcated and ultimately succumb to the same beliefs and practices that continue





structures of separation. By defying, by saying a mindful “no,” we can build small and large communities of peace, kindness, happiness, and understanding, here and now.

NOW IS ALWAYS THE TIME

With so many teachings and teachers accessible to us, what gets in the way of enacting a right-side-up world, now? Why do we continue to conform to the ways of a world that feed greed, hatred, and ignorance? The pace of our lives is one answer. Slowing down this pace is a first step. Slowing down, pausing, allows us to be present for what is with us—in body and mind as well as in our external environment. In this process of noticing, we see clearly and we make decisions in line with our values, with compassion and clarity. We rediscover how we can change moment to moment, over and over again, as we notice our thinking, words, and actions. Clear seeing helps us notice that we need to be in community with others who are also pausing. We notice this helps reinforce our own practices of slowing down when we get caught up again. We discover friends who are also attempting to resist, maladjust, and defy the socially constructed norms of distraction, competition, and extraction. Spiritual friends and communities of resistance help us to withstand the pressure to conform. Communities of resistance remind us that happiness is possible and that happiness does not have to harm others.

Shakyamuni Buddha did not conform to the glitter of the life set forth for him as a young prince. All he had to do was comply. But that was not his true path, and he made

By defying, by saying a mindful “no,” we can build small and large communities of peace, kindness, happiness, and understanding, here and now.

a choice. He defied this life of comfort and sought a world beyond old age, illness, and death. Jesus also did not conform to the rules of the day. He knew there was more to our humanity than greed, hatred, and division. For his defiance he was crucified on a cross, belittled, and mocked with a crown of thorns. Often, there are repercussions for resisting and defying, for maladjusting. No doubt as we have practiced our own acts of resistance and defiance, we have experienced these impacts.

Our resistance is a positive act for freedom—freedom to live into our values. We practice pausing to remember our aspiration to be kind, to look deeply, to understand, and to offer the compassion capable of breaking the chains that bind us to this normalized structure of separation, discrimination, and contempt for those different from us. Our insistence on resisting the structures of oppression is an act in solidarity for all those who live in circumstances where saying “no” is not possible. We resist for them.

We do not act alone for freedom; there is always someone else, somewhere, also acting for freedom. Whether quietly meditating to open our hearts, speaking kind words to a stranger, writing a letter to support someone different from us, carrying a sign that resists hatred, or being arrested for refusing to support tyranny, by resisting we join the collective energy of all those who have ever defied and all those who will defy in the future, to manifest a world that is kind and true. When we resist, we live into our Buddha nature, our Jesus nature, our spiritual nature, our true nature.

Let us resist, defy, and maladjust together today, in a country and world that is breaking hearts and homes apart by displacing people simply because they are different. Now is the time to wake up together, to wake up from the illusion that what happens to queer and trans folks does not affect you. Now is the time to wake up and openly say “no” to the genocide happening in Gaza. Now is the right time to say “not on my watch” when the president of the US allows an unelected, wealthy, white male to eviscerate the federal government workforce and denounce the rule of law via the judicial system. Now is definitely the time to defy a government and its foot soldiers who target immigrants and refugees who, like the original immigrants and refugees to the US, continue to help build the country into the power it is today. Yes, now is the time to wake and act into resisting an authoritarian regime that is attempting to hold superior fame, wealth, greed, and hatred. In a right-side-up world, we wake up over and over again from the illusion that we are separate, better than, less than, or equal to each other. We have the power to do this because we are interconnected and bring each other forward in each moment in space and time. We are already enough to do just that. What are we waiting for?

¹ *Right View is defined by different teachings in Buddhist scriptures: it is understanding life exists according to the three Dharma seals of impermanence, non-self, and nirvana; when we have Right View, we understand life according to The Four Noble Truths of ill-being, its path, and the cessation of ill-being and its path. Having Right View allows us to see things as they really are, note their causes, and understand that we have choice in every moment.*

² *Thích Nhất Hạnh, Daniel Berrigan, The Raft Is Not the Shore: Conversations Toward a Buddhist-Christian Awareness (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 129.*

³ *Valerie Brown, Marisela B. Gomez, MD, Kaira Jewel Lingo, Healing Our Way Home: Black Buddhist Teachings on Ancestors, Joy, and Liberation (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2024), 206-211. <https://www.arisesangha.org/arise-5mt-contemplations>.*

⁴ *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, "MLK: Paul's Letter to American Christians." YouTube video, accessed March 16, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7p5iOhXumaQ&t=2s>*

⁵ *Thích Nhất Hạnh, Teachings on Love (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2002), 142.*

⁶ *Sunita Sah, Defy: The Power of No in a World that Demands Yes (London: One World, 2024).*

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Bhikkhu Bodhi, In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon (Somerville: Wisdom, 2025), 250.*

⁹ *In this writing I refer to Buddhist and Christian spirituality based on my lived experiences of practicing in these spiritual traditions.*

Photos by Marisela Gomez

Marisela B. Gomez, MD/True Manifestation of Reverence is a cofounder of Village of Love and Resistance in Baltimore, Maryland, US, organizing for power, healing, and the reclamation of land. She is a meditation and Buddhist teacher, physician-scientist, and holistic health practitioner. She lives in the lands previously stewarded by the Piscataway, Lumbee, and other tribes, colonized as Baltimore, and practices with the Baltimore and Beyond Mindfulness Community. She is the author of *Race, Class, Power, and Organizing in East Baltimore* and coauthor of *Healing Our Way Home*, along with other scholarly, political, and spiritual writings.





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Diamond Heart
of the
Source

Diamond that Luts



Through the Illusions of Self

Magda
De La Paz
Cabrera

The Earth Is One

Earth Holder Community Care-Taking Council members
share their experiences on growing love and
understanding in fractious times.

This Suffering Is Not Me:

The Diamond That Cuts Through
Illusions and the Avataṃsaka Realm

by Magda Cabrero

I have recently met many people deeply impacted by the actions of the new administration in the United States government. Many of us internalize not only our personal suffering but also the suffering around us. Some feel profoundly alone in their pain, believing it to be permanent. I, too, know what it is to feel unable to detach from suffering—to feel as if I were one with it.

We often find ourselves trapped in mental loops that reinforce the illusion of permanent suffering. Recognizing the deeper reality of interbeing helps us release our attachment to it.

I have experienced this firsthand. After the recent election, I found myself identifying deeply with the suffering of marginalized children and youth. It was an echo of the despair I witnessed when President Trump was first elected in 2016—like an old wound reopening. For weeks, I felt unable to detach from this suffering.

Through meditation and mindful collaboration with others, including my sangha's Engaged Buddhism group, I learned to loosen my clinging and transform this energy into compassionate action. Beginning each day with gratitude and reminding myself *this suffering is not me* continues to support my efforts to let go of ego and experience the profound emptiness of the self.

As Thầy explains, this emptiness is not nihilism; it is freedom from the illusion of a fixed identity. To be empty is to be free—free from false notions of self, from attachment, and from suffering. Nonself is an embrace of impermanence: no birth, no death. To stay true to my path, I must move beyond my attachment to suffering and cultivate a broader, more liberating perspective.

I am learning to let the diamond cut through the illusion that suffering defines me. More clearly than ever, I see how suffering is bound to my deep-seated belief in a separate self, ingrained since childhood. But nothing exists in isolation—there is no separate self, only interbeing.

Through meditation, suffering transforms into compassion, for both ourselves and others. When my suffering felt unbearable, simply sharing it lightened the burden, helping me see that we ultimately belong to each other.

THE ROLE OF THE SANGHA IN HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION

At a recent retreat with the Opening Heart Mindfulness Community, we reflected on Thầy's teachings on Kṣitigarbha, a revered bodhisattva in East Asian Buddhism known for their deep compassion for all sentient life and their vow to guide beings in the hell realms to a better rebirth. Many find inspiration in this bodhisattva, especially during these challenging times.

Just as Kṣitigarbha took refuge in the sangha, Thầy views the sangha as a refuge for individuals, recognizing the immense burden they carry.

Sanghas must be places of support and nourishment for those who tirelessly help others, places where they can rest and restore themselves.

Suffering intensifies when we isolate ourselves; in solitude, we can forget that suffering is universal. Thầy urges us to find a sangha, which he calls Maitreya, the Buddha of Love. The Sangha nurtures mindfulness and peace; it sustains *bodhicitta*, the awakened heart-mind. By offering community, sangha gives us a chance to heal.

During this time of despair for many, I have witnessed people come together to support one another and engage in meaningful action. I see our sangha as a sign of hope.

Personally, I have felt very supported as a sangha member. I know I am not alone in my suffering, and I feel safe expressing it in a space held with confidentiality and compassion. Recently, the head of our sangha reached out to me directly to offer her support, which made me feel truly seen and cared for. Many of our meditations and Dharma topics have centered on themes such as *No Mud, No Lotus*, offering both comfort and insight during challenging times. During Dharma sharing, several members have expressed how much support they have received from the sangha, and how relieved they feel knowing that it is always there for them as a refuge.

Being able to attend my Opening Heart Mindfulness Community sangha regularly

—sometimes as often as three times a week—and to be surrounded by many members who aspire to follow Thầy's teachings and The Five Mindfulness Trainings gives me a deep sense of belonging and safety. Moreover, as an Earth Holder and a member of One Earth Sangha, I feel a strong kinship with others who share my concerns for the environment and social justice. We seem to speak the same language and share the same heart. I don't feel alone in my suffering for the world.

One particularly meaningful effort has been the work of our sangha's Engaged Mindfulness group, of which I am a part. We came together with a shared intention to find ways to support immigrants and the LGBTQ+ community, and we presented our reflections and resources to the larger sangha. This information is now permanently available on our website, openingheartmindfulness.org, and individuals and groups within our community are choosing to take part in these efforts. These endeavors have helped me transform my suffering into meaningful action. Rather than dwell in the pain I perceive in myself and in the world, I now channel my energy into mindful engagement and service.

Reflecting on how Thích Nhất Hạnh engaged with the world to relieve suffering and share his peace, I feel deeply inspired to do the same. I have discovered meaningful ways to take mindful and compassionate action in the world. When I feel

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tired or overwhelmed by suffering, I know I can return to my practice and to the sangha as a place of refuge. The practice not only helps me find the island within myself, but also offers a place of solace, compassion, and understanding—a place where I can truly rest, hand in hand with people who share my values and are committed to easing suffering through mindful, loving action.



Are You Sure?

by Kat Liu

Not long ago, I had breakfast with someone I know from activist circles, someone with whom I've been friendly but do not often speak. Instead, most of our interactions lately have been via posts and comments on social media. The impression that I had of this person was that they ran with a clique of people who are deeply and passionately committed to social justice, angry over the many injustices in our nation and world, and so committed and angry that they are unable to see the humanity of those who actively (or passively) perpetuate these injustices.

However, as we conversed face to face over a shared meal, it became ever clearer to me that the impression I had been holding of this person in my mind was inaccurate, distorted. I realized that the person sitting across from me actually had a much more nuanced and compassionate view of the so-called "other side" than I thought. This

realization made me smile to myself as I recognized that I was doing the same thing others have done to me—seeing one aspect of a person, the aspect that shows up in social media posts and at protests and rallies, and thinking that is all there is to the person.

Although my conversational partner is not Buddhist and probably would not describe it this way, we talked over breakfast about the recognition that everyone's beliefs and actions are the results of many causes and conditions in which they were raised and continue to exist. For example, a person who grew up being taught that humans have dominion over the earth will more likely believe that to be true, whereas someone who grew up being taught that we are all part of an interdependent web of existence will more likely see the world that way. While the first person's views may cause harm to Mother Earth and our sibling animals, plants, and minerals, the person isn't inherently inferior; nor is the second person inherently better. For those of us who seek to make our communities and world more equitable, such judgements of inferiority and superiority can be tempting but are generally unhelpful and unskillful. Instead, we need to meet each person with compassion, seek to understand the causes and conditions that lead to certain beliefs and actions, and where it is possible and beneficial to try to change those conditions.

The realization that someone I know was actually much less angry and intransigent than I had thought made me wonder how many other people I might have misjudged, including people whom I may feel at political odds with. This is not to say there aren't real divisions between people—divisions that have serious consequences for the well-being of marginalized peoples, our sibling species, and Mother Earth—but those divisions may not be as big as they appear, and therefore not as insurmountable either. The conversation was like a mindfulness bell, reminding me that what I perceive may not be all there is, and to try to remain curious and open.

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How to Live Together

by Maira Fernandes de Melo

Our current worldviews tend to divide us into not only two sides, but also a few more. From a binary perspective, there are those of us who are against (someone/something) and those in favor. Beyond this, there are also those in favor of not being against something, people against being in favor of anything, and some of us trying to find some fun in this confusing and endless circle of being right and wrong.

No matter how open we think we are or how free we think we are from our wrong perceptions, they are always waiting in the corner for an unaware moment. I remember a Dharma talk given by Sister Eleni during the 2023-2024 Rains Retreat in Plum Village, France. She mentioned a cartoon about many parts of an elephant and talked about the thousand ways of not really seeing the elephant in the room.¹

Sanghas are a safe space where we can “test” our ability to coexist with—and even love—those who think differently from us. “How come you are a Plum Village practitioner and support this one or that one?” I sometimes think to myself. “This doesn’t make any sense, you haven’t understood the teachings!” When I notice these thoughts, I have to laugh at myself. The time between thinking and laughing has become shorter and shorter—a

sign I’m evolving in the practice! But we “train” in sanghas to build community and connection wherever we go, not only in safe spaces.

Recently, I had the opportunity to work on a partnership project between a research institute and a conservative Christian church designing an online course about climate change for their youth. Having been working on interfaith dialogue for a while now, I know some dogmas are undiscussable *and yet* some peace is possible. Working together daily to design the course helped me see that “they” are not as judgmental as “we” usually think “they” are. (Who’s the judgmental one here?)

I still have a side: I still believe that whatever god is, It is not worried about the gender of my love as much as the quality of it. Though the people I collaborated with are probably not going to become my best friends, it was interesting to see that they are not only nice people but also interested in science—“who would imagine?!” says my prejudice.

Peace is the ability to sustain divergency, accepting that although we do have many differences (thanks to biodiversity), that doesn’t mean we should want to annihilate the other. Are we up to this? Or do we want to live with “our” people, “our” friends, “our” team? Coming from a country where soccer is a national identity, I’ve seen the team thing create bonds and generate marriages as well as dismantle families and kill people. As the Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant



says, identity is constructed in relation—and so is oppression. How can we foster and engage in relationships with those who think, speak, and act so differently from us, even if their actions are complete opposites of our own—and even if they are ultimately threatening our lives?

IS IT POSSIBLE TO GENERATE MOMENTS OF JOY IN SUCH HARD TIMES?

On Water Day, the activist movement I'm part of (a kind of interfaith Wake Up Water group full of wonderful people who work at the intersection of spiritual and environmental activism) came together to host a water festival in the capital of Brazil. We planned the program with love and care. Since it was a youth-focused event, we didn't want it to be sad or boring. We had round tables and serious discussions about the worsening state of water in the country, but we also

invited many people to present already-existent solutions, including social technologies in progress all over the country, and to address diverse water-related issues. We had playful activities, artistic performances, rituals and ceremonies from different spiritualities, artisans offering beautiful crafts, good music, good food, and lots of bonding and connecting. Everyone who attended—including us, the coordinators—left feeling gratitude for life, for people, and for Water.

The most beautiful part was testimony of one of the young indigenous boys who attended the event; it warmed my heart. On the last day, asked if he had liked the festival, he said, "We are used to attending many environmental events, but we always listen and talk about violence, about genocide, about death. What I liked the most is that here we haven't heard about it even once. It was all joy, love, and beauty. It was nourishing and refreshing!"

I then remembered a class on the fifty verses Sister Clear Grace (today Venerable Clear Grace Dayananda) gave.² Something they said stuck with me: "If we want the tug of war to end, we have to drop the rope." But how can I drop the fear that if I put the rope down, "they" will come and get me—even kill me? The Plum Village practice keeps teaching me that it is not only a matter of dropping the rope, but also of starting to play different games—having fun in different ways and enjoying the kindergarten of life from new perspectives.

¹ Sister Từ Nghiêm (Sister Eleni), "The Festival of Stars is Here," October 29, 2023. Plum Village YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpHzA1rlpOo&list=PLaX_vxbhs8fhQGz5eHPpMIgKDfMbUIH7m&index=6

² Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Understanding Our Mind* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2002) <https://deerparkmonastery.org/collections/fifty-verses-on-the-nature-of-consciousness/?page=1>

Ksitigarbha pottery by Kat Liu

Water Festival photo by Kadan Lopes

pages 38-39:

Diamond and Avatamsaka illustration by Magda Cabrero

Dr. Magda De La Paz Cabrero/Bodhi Heart from the Source (she/they) is the author and illustrator of *Walking on Earth with Thích Nhất Hạnh: My Experiences with Silence and the Sanctuaries* and *Kindred Spirits I Found in Many Places*, and its Spanish version, *Mis Andares Por La Tierra Con Mi Maestro Zen Thich Nhat Hahn*. She is a member of Opening Heart Mindfulness Community, where she is a Dharma facilitator, Care-Taking Council member, and coordinator of Engaged Buddhist projects. She is also a member of the Chesapeake Earth Holder Community and a council and board member of the Earth Holder Community. Her website is www.truejustice4youth.org.



Kat Liu/Joyful Engagement of the Heart (she/her/ta) is the daughter of Chinese immigrants to the United States by way of Taiwan. She grew up with a cultural mix of Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, and folk traditions from her family and exposure to Christianity from the larger dominant society. Kat received The Five Mindfulness Trainings in 2016 during an Earth Holder retreat at Deer Park Monastery. In addition to sitting on the Care-Taking Council for Earth Holder Community, Kat works as a coordinator for ARISE Sangha (Awakening through Race, Intersectionality, and Social Equity). She finds joy in helping beautiful things to arise in the world, mainly through community organizing, writing, gardening, ceramics, and stained glass art.

Maíra Fernandes de Melo, PhD/True Powerful Earth (she/it) is a Brazilian journalist, poet, activist, and Order of Interbeing member. Born in the lands of Tupinambás, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, she grew up surrounded by the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the mountains of the Atlantic Forest. She also lived in Argentina, land of Guaraníes—the dense stream of Paraná River embracing her body. Living in the Global South, she has witnessed all sorts of colonialism, imperialism, and social, racial, and environmental injustices. Maíra has Indigenous and European human ancestors, and is a daughter of Oxóssi, orisha of the forests in Brazilian candomblé. She dwells happily in hammocks and jabuticaba trees, loves the scent of wet earth, lots of coffee, and walking barefoot, and she is super happy to live the Zen teachings in a Brazilian kind of way.



Growing Peace



Amidst these divisive times, the Plum Village Happy Farm project in France, now in its thirteenth year, continues to bring together people from all over the world to practice mindfulness and grow food for our communities. This past winter, we experienced a legendary moment as Deer Park Monastery (California, US) broke ground on its own Happy Farm project. The now global Happy Farm project is not passive in the face of the present global political and social situation. Our Happy Farm project is radically political in its contribution to the evolution of local and global food systems. Collectively, we view the work we undertake as spiritual activism in the face of the polycrisis, as we act directly on behalf of climate, nature, and our society. We take pride in acting as a catalyst for other forms of activism in these realms that manifest all over the world. Happy Farm is committed to building sangha and common unity. We share the aspiration to cultivate a foundation of spiritual friendship, kindness, and understanding, supporting personal and collective stability, capacity, healing, and transformation.

I had the good fortune to be able to travel to Deer Park Monastery this past winter to offer what experience and skills that I could to help Deer Park Happy Farm come to life. Thầy Pháp Dung and Thầy Pháp Lưu are two of the tall trees in the monastic sangha at Deer Park Monastery. They are trailblazers and manifesters. Together with the equally dynamic efforts,

Order of Interbeing member Mick McEvoy and
Dharma Teacher Aaron Solomon share about
community farming as love in action.



energies, skills, and experience of long-term lay residents Aaron Solomon, Nikolay Amirov, and Josh Sowers, they have helped create the conditions for Deer Park Happy Farm to come into existence at this time when the world is no longer practicing 'business as usual.'

I asked Aaron to share what the creation and development of Deer Park Happy Farm has meant to him in relation to building community in these divisive times.

—Mick McEvoy

In these divisive times, a revolutionary act of resistance at the center of Plum Village practice is simple yet profound: feeding each other. This is the miracle of generosity. If we want peace in the world, we must be able to feed everyone. When we start to give the little bit that we have, everyone is inspired to give. Suddenly we have an enormous amount of generosity and enough to feed everyone. It seems very simple and straightforward. Yet it can be a miracle, a source of wonder, joy, and celebration.

At Deer Park Monastery, we have just started a new Happy Farm, which has been bringing us so much joy. Volunteers have been coming on Saturdays to help build the farm; over sixty volunteers joined our first Happy Farm community work day on March 8, 2025. On the farm, our aspiration is to work in solidarity and mindfulness, following our breath,

celebrating together the tender shoots of the new plants, and lending our effort together. In this way we touch joy and the work does not feel like a burden at all. After our morning working time, we join the entire community for a shared meal, very much in line with the teachings of generosity and feeding everyone.

Through this shared work on the land, we embody a concrete act of resistance; this is our love in action. We want to build a farm together so that we can feed everyone without extracting or oppressing anyone. The revolutionary act of sharing resources, of building a community of harmony and understanding, is itself nonviolence. In Thích Nhất Hạnh's early vision of community, he saw cooperative land stewardship as a way of creating interdependence without exploitation.¹ He envisioned communities where "members of the village co-op are responsible for helping each other" and where "nobody can be indifferent." When one person suffers, everyone is affected. This radical interconnection stands in stark contrast to our current society's emphasis on individualism, extraction, and wealth accumulation. By cultivating the land together, we're also cultivating a different way of seeing ourselves—not as separate, isolated beings, but as integral parts of a living, breathing whole.

Each of us has a longing to reconcile. In our tradition, we see that we cannot do this by force, but can do it through building understanding around our shared humanity. We see that the simple acts we do every day in community—walking meditation, eating together, working together down on the farm, or just taking care of our hamlet—all those actions in mindfulness are seeds for the possibility of healing. In these divisive times, these seemingly ordinary acts become profound statements of another way of being. When we dig our hands into the soil together, when we share the harvest, and when we break bread at the same table, we're creating sacred spaces where healing can happen across the deepest divides.

The practice of farming mindfully teaches us confidence in the path of transformation—in ourselves and others. The tiniest and most ancient of life forms, thermophilic bacteria, as



they transform compost into soil, continue day after day in the work of patient transformation. This is their love in action. In many ways, they are the foundation of our farm. These beings remind us that our own suffering and conflict, when held lovingly in community, can begin to transform. In these times of division and violence, our practice of cultivating community, of feeding each other and sharing generosity, is crucial for generating the strength and love we need to call for an end to violence, and for the transformation of oppression and the healing of wounds.

—Aaron Solomon

'From the recent book In Love and Trust: Letters from a Zen Master. In 1973, Thầy wrote to the director of the School of Youth for Social Service about the moshav model, a type of cooperative agricultural community in Israel. He was particularly interested in how these communities balanced individual family needs with collective responsibility and mutual support—seeing potential applications for Buddhist villages. The moshav model features families with private homes and land plots while maintaining collective planning, resource sharing, and mutual aid systems. Thầy saw in this model possibilities for “voluntary socialization through concrete examples” that aligned with Buddhist principles of interdependence.

Photos courtesy of Aaron Solomon

Mick McEvoy/True Pure Earth (he/him), an Irish native, lives, works, and studies in the community of Plum Village, France. Mick brings over twenty years of experience working with people, plants, and mindfulness practice to his management of the Happy Farm and rewilding projects. The farm welcomes hundreds of retreatants annually and combines mindfulness-based approaches with seasonal organic food production and land stewardship rooted in deep ecology.



Aaron Solomon/True Dharma Fulfillment (he/him) is a Dharma teacher, counselor, trauma healer, outdoor educator, and climate justice activist. He resides at Deer Park Monastery, US, where he actively supports community building, including young adult programs and the new Happy Farm project. He was previously a monastic for fourteen years, living at Plum Village, France and Blue Cliff Monastery, US, and received Lamp Transmission in 2016. He is also a current member of the North American Dharma Teacher Sangha Care-Taking Council (CTC) and the North American Earth Holder Community CTC. Learn more about Aaron at integratedmindfulness.life.

Realizing True Education



**Leaders of the
international Wake Up Schools initiative
offer stories of building connection and community.**

Wake Up Schools supports educators in bringing Plum Village mindfulness practice and applied ethics into their own lives so they may be happier and more free, and in turn share these practices with colleagues and students in their school communities. We accomplish this through retreats and Days of Mindfulness for educators, regular online educator gatherings, and country and regional educator sanghas and training programs. Because we believe that learning from one's own personal experience and those of others leads to embodied understanding, stories about practice play a special role. As leaders of the Wake Up Schools initiative, we offer the following stories focused on building connection and community.

LEARNING FOR EACH OTHER

by Richard Brady, US

In his June 1992 Plum Village retreat, I received a prize lesson about collaboration from Thầy, who'd been my teacher for three years. Before inviting us to leave the meditation hall for our first outdoor walking meditation of the retreat, he asked us to be aware of others walking nearby. "You may notice someone walking very beautifully. If so, there's no reason to be jealous. That person's practice is supporting your own. Similarly, your walking supports the practice of others around you." He then gave each of us a sticker to put in one of our walking shoes. It read "I walk for you." Seeing the sticker each day as I slipped on my shoes for walking meditation, I felt myself as one with my fellow retreatants.

Later that summer, before school began, I ordered stickers reading "I learn for you." On the first day of class, when I introduced the small-group work we would be doing all year, I distributed these stickers. They were to be applied to the covers of the students' textbooks—a reminder, I told them, that their learning was also for the benefit of other students, and vice versa. In Thích Nhất Hạnh's tradition, practicing mindfulness in a sangha, or spiritual community, is of prime importance. To give and receive support makes a sangha or a classroom a home for all!¹

¹ *From Walking the Teacher's Path with Mindfulness: Stories for Reflection and Action by Richard Brady, Routledge, 2021*

TEACHING LOVING SPEECH AND DEEP LISTENING TO TEACHERS

by Guillaume Chave, France

I am a French teacher, and I regularly facilitate workshop days for educators with several friends in the Plum Village tradition at Healing Spring Monastery in Seine et Marne, near Paris.

One of the main Plum Village practices that seems important to educators is to cultivate deep listening and loving speech.

In 2010, when our "Educ'inspir" meetings were founded by Christiane Terrier (who is now physically gone but so present in our hearts and minds), we discovered a wonderful practice: People sit face to face, and for three minutes the first person expresses herself on a situation that she experienced in the past. The workshop theme (such as anger or feeling supported) can be a prompt.

The practice is to share without judging, with loving words, just describing the situation and feelings. The other person listens deeply with all her heart and breathes mindfully, welcoming all the emotions and feelings that arise within her, totally present and silent. Then, after a ring of the bell, both breathe together, and the listener shares her summary of what he or she just heard. Then they change roles. Next, for two minutes each, they share with each other how they felt as they were listened to.

Every time, people cry and hug each other. This practice is very powerful and can lead to better habits in future conversations, such as trying not to interrupt your interlocutor even if you don't agree with them.

It really could be a step for peace in human relations!

CONNECTING WITH CHILDREN, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS

by Catherine Fiscus, France

I have been practicing meditation in the Plum Village tradition and participating in "Educ'inspir" days since 2013. I was a social worker in the public schools of Nanterre, near Paris, and I was wondering how to support children (six to twelve years old) who were stressed, had difficulties calming down and concentrating, and had bad relations with others. Their parents were not aware of the suffering of their children, or not ready to accept help from social workers.

I created the workshop "I Breathe," which I held once a week at lunchtime. For thirty to forty

minutes, I welcomed twelve children and one teacher to a quiet room in the school—a quiet time to be kind with oneself and with others, and to rest.

In France, public schools are strictly secular. I never spoke of Buddhism. But I transmitted a lot of Plum Village practices: inviting the bell, exercises of breathing, songs like “Happiness Is Here and Now,” the inner weather report, pebble meditation, the Three Earth Touchings, eating something in mindfulness, movements of yoga, and at last, total relaxation ... with children deeply asleep.

At the end of the year, I presented a ‘diploma’ to those who joined more than five workshops. One little girl came forty-six times! The children enjoyed these workshops; for me, it was a great opportunity to practice with them in school. It improved my connection with the children, the families, and the teachers. It also protected me from burnout as a social worker. I offered these practices until my retirement in 2024.

SHARING STORIES OF CONNECTION WITH TEACHERS

by Joost Vriens, Netherlands

Our Dutch online education sangha started on a Sunday evening in May 2022. In the beginning, a lot of teachers wanted to join because they needed a curriculum for mindfulness lessons in school.

Based on the Wake Up Schools’ foundation that the first and most important step is for the teacher to deepen her or his practice, we offer a guided meditation and some space for walking meditation. After silent meditation, we close with space for sharing.

After some time, I discovered a new practice. Every Friday evening, I write an invitation for others to join the sangha, connecting our practices and insights to the daily experience of people who work in the education field. Sometimes inspiration for these invitations comes from my personal experience as a teacher. I once walked by a school and saw an

Being relaxed
is crucial in this
time when society
is changing
drastically.

angry child and an angry teacher. I try to support teachers in their challenges at school, and I use those small experiences as an inspiration for a theme.

"Uncertainty" is one such theme. The inspiration came from a teacher who could see vulnerability and uncertainty at the root of the challenging behavior of her students. One morning, she suddenly realized that she had been using her position as a teacher to cling to things that seemed important, such as knowledge, her profession, or rules because the students' uncertainty touched her uncertainty. She started sharing this with her students. Wonderful conversations followed and relations improved.

Not everybody who receives this invitation joins the sangha. But we have received feedback that these experience-based invitations nourish their practice. We are now working on a website to make these themes available for more teachers.

A NOURISHING EDUCATOR SANGHA PRACTICE: BEING PRESENT WITH TIREDNESS AND ONESELF

by Kumiko Jin, Japan

One of the things we've learned in establishing an educator sangha in Japan is that it is very helpful for busy teachers to attend a monthly two-hour virtual educator mindfulness evening. Once every three or four months, we offer an in-person gathering to learn and be nourished by each other's presence. The practice of total relaxation is always included in the schedule, and I am very happy to see the educators looking more relaxed and at ease at the end of the gathering.

Some of them said that they came to "learn" mindfulness to know how to teach it, but in the end, they found out how tired they had been and hadn't noticed it before they connected deeply with themselves. This is an essential insight and experience for teachers—to connect with



themselves. Being relaxed is crucial in this time when society is changing drastically. Fear and anxiety cover many parts of the world, so it is very important for educators to nurture the capacity to be relaxed and peaceful.

I have learned this from personal experience.

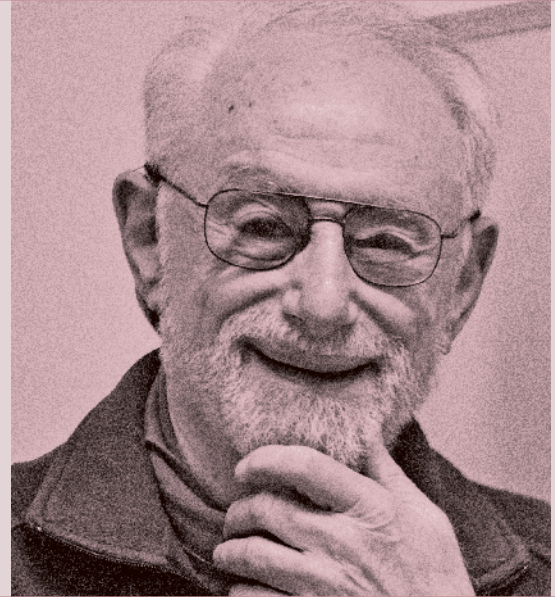
In 2019, I was diagnosed with an incurable autoimmune system disease. I was hospitalized for two weeks and practiced a lot in the hospital. I realized the importance of mindfulness practice for the limited life of this body. My body got tired easily, so I couldn't do both full-time teaching and sharing mindfulness with other teachers. I had to

accept my tiredness. I changed my job to teach part time so that I had enough energy and time to support the educator sangha in Japan. This included starting the translation project of *Happy Teachers Change the World* with educator sangha members, a project which has profoundly connected us. Time and again, mindfulness helped me choose the right direction.

Deep relaxation in front of Mt.Fuji photo by Kumiko Jin

Deep relaxation at Waseda University photo by Sonoko Triumi

Richard Brady/True Dharma Bridge writes, leads retreats in the Plum Village tradition for educators, and coordinates Wake Up Schools. He was ordained as a Dharma teacher by Thích Nhất Hạnh in 2001. Richard is the author of *Walking the Teacher's Path with Mindfulness* and *Short Journey Home*. He practices with the Mountains and Rivers Mindfulness Community and lives with his partner Elisabeth in Putney, Vermont, US.



Guillaume Chave/True Rejoicing of Spring is a forty-nine-year-old French teacher who takes care of students between six and twelve with special cognitive needs. He was ordained as an Order of Interbeing member in May 2021. Guillaume regularly facilitates with four of his friends the "Educ'inspir" workshops, which were originally created in Maison de l'Inspir by Christiane Terrier (a wonderful Dharma teacher who passed away in July 2018), and practices in the Plum Village tradition for educators or any people interested in education at the Healing Spring Monastery near Paris. He also helps facilitate mindfulness evenings once a month in Paris with Garden of the Instant, the Parisian Sangha of Plum Village, and lives in Pantin near Paris with his wife, Murielle, and their children, Oliver (twenty-two) and Amélie (nineteen).



Catherine Fiscus/Generous Word of the Heart

received The Five Mindfulness Trainings in 2004 in Plum Village. A social worker in public schools, she participates with friends in organizing “Educ’inspir” (Wake Up School) days. Catherine practices with the little sangha of Nanterre (France), where she lives with her youngest daughter, near her grandchildren.

**Joost Vriens/Attentive Mountain of the Heart**

received The Five Mindfulness Trainings in 2021 in Plum Village. He is a facilitator of Eindhoven Sangha in the Netherlands. In 2022, together with Baltus van Laatum, Joost founded an online sangha for Dutch educators. In 2023, he retired after forty years of teaching in a secondary vocational school to join Richard Brady and Elena Cardo in succeeding Orla O’Sullivan as an International Wake Up Schools Coordinator. In this role, Joost coordinates Happy Teachers Sangha International. He has a son, Jorne (thirty-four), and a daughter, Fenna (thirty-one).



Kumiko Jin/Inclusive Mountain of the Heart (pictured with Sister Kính Nghiêṃ) received The Five Mindfulness Trainings in 2016 at the Mt. Fuji retreat in Japan. She is a public high school history teacher and a university lecturer in Tokyo. She is a founder of the Japanese Educator Sangha group, and since 2017, she has been a member of the Plum Village bid-committee, which organizes the Plum Village Japan tour every year. She is translating *Happy Teachers Change the World* into Japanese. She also practices with the Tokyo Wind of Smile Sangha.





Returning to the Teachings for Clarity on Gaza

**Melanie Gin shares how she has taken refuge in
The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings and the sangha
as antidotes to despair and shame.**

I will do my very best to not let war harden my heart to anyone ...

In December 2024, I traveled to Deer Park Monastery to support a beautiful collective aspiration: Action Wake Up, a fifteen-month residential training program for young people in mindfulness, community living, and social justice. I was part of a small team of six dedicated Wake Up friends, operating under the leadership of Thầy Pháp Lưu and Brother Minh Niệm.

One afternoon, I spoke with my dear friend Idris (a long-term resident at Deer Park) about the shame I have carried over the genocide in Gaza. Since October 2023, I have struggled to take wise action while a military state armed with American weapons has killed families, destroyed neighborhoods, and limited the flow of critical humanitarian aid. I haven't known what to do or say to make the violence stop. Spiritual and activist communities I love have fractured due to political disagreement.

A few days later, at a dining table facing wintery trees, Idris approached me. "You've been so hard on yourself, Melanie," they said with compassion, naming the ways in which I've offered care to the

sangha over the years. "You are a treasure," I cried and cried, feeling the wounds of self-hatred and anger soften and heal.

A sangha that I helped to start did not survive the emotional toll of those early days after October 7th. I did not have the clarity to understand how to "stand up against injustice" without taking sides, and I could not fulfill caretaking responsibilities. The sangha faded away. It took me a year to approach the dissolution of the sangha as anything other than personal failure. I lost confidence in my ability to organize or facilitate safe spaces for those suffering from any form of violence or oppression.

I was caught in despair for nearly a year before I arrived at Deer Park Monastery to support Action Wake Up. In planning sessions with our team, Thầy Pháp Lưu and Brother Minh Niệm inspired me with their deep faith in The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings. Returning to the trainings felt like drinking from a well after scouring the desert for water—refreshing, clarifying, and

healing. I touched a deep inner wisdom within me that transcended my fear of being wrong or of disappointing those I love. The trainings offered me the gift of freedom.

CONNECTING TO THE MINDFULNESS TRAININGS FOR GUIDANCE ON GAZA

I share my understanding of wise thought, speech, and action in the text that follows. As I write, I recognize that there is no unchanging truth. I will continue to look for truth in my heart, and in the hearts of those who are suffering, through the practice of deep listening.

I will practice reverence for life by not supporting any act of killing in the world, or in my thinking, speech, or actions. I will practice deep looking with my sanghas to find ways to protect life, prevent war, and build peace. I will not support Israel's military invasion and bombardment of Gaza or the ongoing genocide and abductions of the Palestinian people. And I will not support the violence, hostage-taking, and killings committed by Hamas militants on October 7, 2023.

I will practice openness and non-attachment to views while taking a clear stand against oppression and injustice in Gaza. There is no equivocation: Hamas killed roughly 1,200 people and took 200 people hostage on October 7th. The state of Israel has killed 45,000 people (and counting); forced thousands to flee homes and shelters; destroyed neighborhoods, schools, and hospitals; killed journalists, aid workers, medics, and many children. I must state clearly that Israel's military occupation of Palestine is unjust and oppressive.

I will heal my own trauma from fifteen months working in Jerusalem and the West Bank, in close proximity to the violence of Israel's occupation. I will get to know better the immobility and panic that arises in my body when thinking about the genocide of a people that I grew to love. I will notice if and when hatred arises, for myself and for others. I will do my very best to not let war harden my heart to anyone, not even Netanyahu, Biden, or Trump. When that is not possible, I will practice compassion to the best of my ability.

I will stand for true peace that gives all people a path to safety, shelter, clean water and food, and the absence of violence and oppression. I will resist the pressure from political actors and organizations to demonize any side. I will practice looking with the eyes of interbeing and recognizing that we are all cells in one sangha body.

I will practice loving myself through failure, and being with my deep fear of being somehow unlovable because of it. Thanks to the care of the sangha, and my involvement in Action Wake Up and other Plum Village projects, I am beginning to accept that failure is welcome, a natural risk of trying something new or being brave.

GOING FORTH ...

It feels important to acknowledge failure in order to reconcile with myself and the sangha. To allow a return to the deep well of love and forgiveness within me and within the sangha. This forgiveness frees me to do the work that is mine, to try again in new forms to work toward peace. In the healing silence of Deer Park Monastery, buoyed by Wake Up friends on the path, I was able to reinvigorate faith in myself, and in the possibility of small acts of peacebuilding to change the world.

In January 2024, when asked about a wise response to the war in Gaza, Thầy Pháp Dung spoke of our teacher, who chose three times to rebuild a village destroyed by American bombs. His message: Do not give up your hope. Do something. Start a garden. Offer kindness to a stranger or loved one. In other words, do not get stuck in the despair or horror of violence.

To my future self, and to all those who may resonate with feelings of shame, doubt, and insecurity: Know that you are one cell in a vast and beautiful sangha body. Take refuge in the teachings when caught in fear or despair. Trust in the sangha to know the next step. Do your part to work diligently toward peace. It is okay to start small.

Photos by Melanie Gin



Melanie Gin/True Light of Aspiration (she/they) is a Buddhist poet and budding gardener delighting in the mystery of the earth. Her tools are wonder, play, slowness, and a deeply felt sense of integrity. Melanie works in civic tech supporting a strong social safety net and a future where everyone has what they need to thrive. She lives in the hills of El Cerrito, California, US (unceded Ohlone land) with her partner and elder dog.



Finding Our True Home

Sister Hoa Nghiêm expresses gratitude for the support to build the new nunnery at Blue Cliff Monastery and teaches about practicing in “the AI era.”

Sitting in the quiet room, closing my eyes and breathing deeply, I feel peace filling my body and mind. This is truly a loving spiritual home. A few days after I returned from Vietnam, Sister Lâm Nghiêm informed me that we had been granted a permit to build a nunnery, to be called Moon Lake Building. There is no greater happiness. The buddhas and bodhisattvas, especially the Blue Cliff Monastery land ancestors, have supported us. Moreover, I believe Thầy has always supported his students having a proper place to study and practice so they can sow seeds of love and understanding in the Eastern United States.

Today, on the way back from the meditation hall, passing Moon Lake Building I saw the roof's iron bars being erected and workers covering the thin boards before installing the corrugated iron roof. The house is slowly rising, standing firmly under the sky and clouds. The workers are laboring like hardworking bees despite the cold winter. Soon, electricians, plumbers, and window and floor installers will come to do their work so the project will be completed by the fall of 2025. We

are grateful to the workers, engineers, architects, lawyers, volunteers, and benefactors. With their hands, minds, and spiritual gifts, small or large, each person has contributed to the nunnery's construction. This is truly a sangha project.

I remember when I returned to Blue Cliff Monastery in 2014, I had no intention of building anything. But looking around, I saw many buildings in serious disrepair while the number of meditators coming to the monastery was increasing. Initially, we needed to build a new, spacious, and warm dining room for winter. But just one year later, the original Moon Lake Building, where the nuns first lived, was about to collapse, even as White Crane Hamlet welcomed more and more nuns to join the hamlet to study and practice. We lacked housing and classrooms, so the nuns had to take rooms from guests. At that time, the nuns still did not have a proper nunnery; our accommodations, classrooms, and living areas were scattered everywhere. I realized we needed to build a nunnery so visiting practitioners would have more places to come and practice. Moreover,



the new nunnery would be a peaceful and cozy place for the nuns to gather energy to return to their practice.

When I shared my intention and desire to build a new nunnery, many sisters responded positively. I still remember when I returned to my room, Sister Lâm Nghiêm came to see me and said she had received the blueprints from a friend. She also promised to accompany me during the construction process. I was so happy to have the solidarity of many sisters in the community accompanying me to build a project that was not easy in New York state.

When we started planning to build, we worried because we had nothing. How could we start? I suddenly remembered Thầy saying to me, "Don't worry my child. Let the Buddha and the patriarchs take care of you. Just focus on practicing!" The nuns and monks all encouraged me to raise donations. For my elder, Sister Chân Không, raising funds seemed very easy, but not for me. I have never requested anything from the public. I remembered the words of Zen Master Trúc Lâm:

"Be happy in life. Depend on the causes and conditions when they come." So, I practiced according to Thầy and the ancestral teachers' teachings, letting conditions manifest by themselves. When I presented the matter to Sister Chân Không, she was very happy and supported us immediately. I felt that the conditions for building the nunnery were beginning to manifest.

Just last year, Sister Chân Không and the Deer Park abbess, Sister Trung Chính, came to lay the foundation stone, and now the new Moon Lake Building is taking shape day by day. I feel joy growing in me every day as the new nunnery manifests. How could the Moon Lake nunnery gradually take shape like this if it weren't for Sister Chân Không's loving support and the generous donors, friends, and relatives who extended their hands to contribute? The more I think about it, the more grateful I feel. So I often tell my younger sisters, "We must practice properly to be worthy of the love of our close friends and donors who have been and are extending their hands to contribute." I am also very grateful to my younger sister Lâm

Nghiêm for working with the architects and engineers. I am even more grateful to the nuns who are here; each one gives a hand in caring for and supporting each other to operate and raise funds for construction of the new nunnery.

Recently, more and more young people—Vietnamese and Western—have been coming to our Days of Mindfulness at Blue Cliff. This year in particular, the sangha from the Northeastern United States have asked us to organize activities at the monastery at different times. In the past when Thầy came on his US tour, almost all of these practitioners attended the retreat with him. Now, their hair is gray, no one is young anymore, and some have passed away. Looking at them, my respect arises because they all practice very diligently.

In addition, on weekends or during winter and spring breaks, universities and high schools in neighboring states ask to come here to practice. Students say they feel very peaceful when they come. They temporarily stop using electronic devices such as phones and computers, get in touch with nature, meditate, and eat in silence. They are also taught by monks and nuns how to calm their stress, anxiety, and emotions. In March 2025, we will have about one hundred students from different universities join a weekend retreat.

Last September, I went with some brothers and sisters to guide mindfulness practice at Dreamforce—an annual event organized by Salesforce. After more than a week of guiding business people, I returned to the monastery for more than two days, but the image of Dreamforce lingers in my mind. How can I forget a place with thousands of people, bustling and noisy, suddenly becoming a peaceful place?

We had only three days to conduct retreats for entrepreneurs and people who work a lot with new technology. This year, Dreamforce focused on AI (artificial intelligence) technology. Our retreats had only a few dozen attendees. I felt sorry for them, but I couldn't blame them because the place we conducted the retreats was not in the center of the event; few people passed by and knew about it. And not all entrepreneurs like to practice. The faces of those who came to us were full of fatigue and stress. We guided them to meditate with mindful breathing, relaxing their bodies and minds. After just a few minutes of sitting quietly and returning to their breathing, they shared that the stress from having to collect too much information about new technology in a very short time had eased. They expressed gratitude for our presence.

During the sessions, we guided them to practice mindfulness and apply it in daily life, as



well as adapt it to the AI era, when people like machines to do all the work without using their own hands or brain. Interacting with them, I realized how important mindfulness practice is for businessmen as well as for the entire society.

In general, I see clearly that the Plum Village practice is very suitable for the information technology era because the practice is not rigid in its form. Any time, anywhere, we can stop for a few seconds to breathe, to dwell in our true home with mindful breathing. Even when working hard, we can stop and return to our breathing. Just ten breaths and we will feel our mind's tension ease. They listened very attentively and seemed interested. I told them to come back and practice and miracles would appear.

I also see the importance of monastics in American society. That is why every year Salesforce invites the Plum Village Sangha to come for a few days and guide them in their practice. I think that, as a monastic, I must do the work of a monastic to liberate myself and to help society. Thầy, when founding the School of Youth for Social Service, said, "How can we sit still and practice for ourselves while the country is at war, and the people are poor and suffering?" That was decades ago during the Vietnam War, but is it different now? Many people around us, especially young people, are suffering. They need to be

guided to the bright path instead of going down the dark path. This society that seeks material comfort is full of traps. Without mindfulness, without practice, those external glitters will turn into hell in the future.

Thầy's wish is to bring the Dharma to the West. We also hope that Blue Cliff Monastery will be a place where lost people have the opportunity to come to practice in order to transform their suffering and find their true home.

Photos courtesy of Sister Hoa Nghiêm

Sister Hoa Nghiêm became a nun in 1991 and received transmission to be a Dharma teacher in 1998 from Thích Nhất Hạnh. She has lived at Plum Village in France; Green Mountain Dharma Center in Vermont and Deer Park Monastery in California, US; Tây Linh Temple and Diệu Trạm Temple in Vietnam; and Plum Village Thailand. Sister Hoa Nghiêm now lives at Blue Cliff Monastery in New York, US, where she serves as an elder sister, Dharma teacher, and retreat organizer.



Going Forth and Thriving Together

**Order of Interbeing member David Viafora
shares about creating harmony
for living in true community.**

One of the most powerful teachings I ever received on starting a new sangha and intentional community was at Dharma Gaia meditation center on the subtropical North Island of New Zealand, land of the Indigenous Māori people. During this leg of our community research tour, my then partner Vanessa Ixil Chavez and I traveled from the concrete streets of Athens, Greece, to this vegetal paradise of a retreat and residential mindfulness center that the Dharma Gaia community had steadily and simply built over fifteen years. After two weeks there, Vanessa and I had the opportunity to meet privately with the founding teacher, Sister Shalom, and her sangha cofounder, Anton Bank. I asked Sister Shalom, “We would love to hear the story of how you built this gorgeous retreat center and community—would you share with us?” Cutting through the surface and getting to the heart of the matter, Sister Shalom said in her casual yet fierce Zen way, “You want to know how we did it? We rolled up our sleeves and learned as we went. That’s how we built it.” It was simple, no-nonsense wisdom. My mind flashed images of her with a shovel or pitchfork working in the dirt and mud of Dharma Gaia’s wild forest, long before the gorgeous flower and vegetable gardens that are now flourishing. Initially though, I was disappointed by her brevity—I had been hoping for a long, dramatic portrayal of community spirit and challenges overcome (which she and Anton did eventually share with us). But when I began developing a new retreat center and sangha years later, the simple wisdom of her first response came back to me during many trying moments.

Feelings of doubt plagued my momentum during the first several months after moving to the land of the Catawba people in North Carolina. *Who am I to start a mindfulness retreat center anyway? Maybe I’m not a strong enough practitioner and sangha leader to succeed here. People will see that we’re inexperienced impostors!* I began questioning my decisions and leadership capacity, feeling afraid of failure and others’ judgments, and intimidated by my own shortcomings. Then I remembered flashes of Sister Shalom’s gestures as her hands rolled up her imaginary sleeves. “This is how we built it!” I started telling myself the same: *Time to roll up my sleeves.... This is how we*



build it! This mantra gave me an inner push of confidence to believe in each step of the work, regardless of future results, and trust in the great experiment of sangha building, step by step, mistake by mistake, friend by friend, and moment by moment. Although I may have been disappointed if we didn't succeed, I would never regret having offered my very best to this precious opportunity.

Building community is an act of trust that what we have to offer is already enough, that we are already enough, that our ancestors and their transmission are enough. Whether we are building a new retreat center, starting a new sangha, or initiating any community, we trust that our intentions to serve, learn, and grow alongside others are enough. We trust that our ancestors are there within us, supporting, guiding, and encouraging our every move toward our lost heritage of loving community. With such trust, fear no longer holds such a heavy burden on us. We know that we will fall down and fail hundreds, even thousands, of times; yet we will grow even stronger, rebound even higher, and experience more collective joy than before as well. As community builders, our greatest task is to simply show up, roll up our sleeves, and smile as we dig in together.

HARMONY IS THE NATURE OF THE SANGHA

As we dig into the soil of community building, we discover one essential element that keeps a sangha alive and flourishing: *harmony*. It is the enduring theme that profoundly affects every other principle of community life, from visioning to friendships, silence to service, appreciation to joy, and racial healing to healthy boundaries. Harmony is the nature of the sangha. It is the lifeblood and heartbeat of community living. If you take only one message and practice for your community, may it be the power of harmony.

When I started visioning our sangha residential community and refugee service projects in Athens, Greece, I was worried that our sangha would face overwhelmingly stressful conditions given the severity of the refugee crisis. I needed support and had a chance to meet with Brother Pháp Hữu, the abbot of Plum Village Upper Hamlet. Brother



Pháp Hữu was in his mid-thirties at the time, but he entered the monastery at just fourteen years old, so he was extremely experienced in sangha life. He served as Thầy's personal attendant for over a decade before becoming the abbot in his late twenties. Brother Pháp Hữu has the heart and smile of a playful child, but his community leadership is something between a wise elder and a seasoned point guard, always supporting other community members to make good plays and become better players. (He is also actually a pretty great basketball player!)

I asked Pháp Hữu for his advice and encouragement to help make this challenging project a success. Without hesitation, he looked me in the eyes and said with a knowing smile, "It's all about harmony—that's the key. This is my experience. If your community is harmonious and joyful, you can do so much together, you can help so many people, you can do whatever you want. But without harmony, you got *nothin'*!"

I nodded and thought to myself, *Yeah, we can organize morning meetings and everyone can discuss things together.* As if reading my mind, Brother Pháp Hữu added, "But you don't have to be super formal and strict about it—that can kill the joy."

I heard about Brother Pháp Hữu's harmonizing skills from many of the monks, young and old. My friend Chad, who entered monastic life for several years in Plum Village, explained, "Pháp Hữu has this amazing ability to help everyone in the sangha feel deeply heard and included. Sometimes you're in a meeting and someone says something that everyone else just groans at—maybe it seems ridiculous or it's just difficult to hear. Pháp Hữu will listen and pick out the one hidden gem of that brother's sharing and reflect it back for the rest of the community to hear and appreciate. It brings the whole community together." Harmony is not merely a state of mind; it is a practice of continually cultivating receptive attention and offering generous, appropriate support for ourselves and others.

I've tried to emulate Brother Pháp Hữu's practice in community living, and I've often found it quite challenging, actually. It is so easy to get caught in my beliefs about what is right or what is best, which leads to small standoffs with others, even about minor



decisions. This frame of mind doesn't allow me to listen in ways that help me understand, validate, and support the diverse ideas, opinions, and needs that others bring to the table. I need to be reminded about what is most important to our community's well-being—harmony. Does the sangha's happiness depend more on whether my views are implemented or whether others feel heard and encouraged? This is the ancient dance of being right versus being happy.

Just this morning, a sangha board member who owns our property strongly requested that we keep a small couch in the meditation hall for him to sit on whenever he came. When I heard his staunch opinion, I was ready to go toe to toe with him to make sure we maintained the correct and best environment in our meditation hall, which in my opinion doesn't include couches. As the programming lead and more experienced practitioner, I was ready to use my expertise and leadership role to combat and override his views. But using force and personal power to achieve desired outcomes that fit my personal views is dangerous, I've learned. Whether or not I get my way, this approach erodes the sacred fabric of inclusive collaboration and harmony of views. When I recognized this habit arising, I went for a slow walk outside and followed my breathing while listening to spring frogs croaking freely and the babbling brook running through the redbud trees. The harmony between the forest creatures sounded so effortless. I remembered Brother Pháp Hữu's beaming smile and gentle words, "It's all about harmony—that's the key."

Does the sangha's happiness depend more on whether my views are implemented or whether others feel heard and encouraged?

My face relaxed, my righteousness softened, and my attitude downshifted to first gear. By the end of my walk, I knew I would initiate a conversation in which both his needs and my perspectives could be fully heard and included. When harmony becomes the ultimate aim, everything else orients around it. No matter where our solar system travels in the Milky Way, the planets always circle around the Sun.

LEARNING AS WE GO

Even after sangha building for over twenty years, I still have so many questions. Many limitations, mistakes, and challenging situations continue to arise in stewarding my own community. Bringing curiosity and kind attention to these questions unleashes a gentle and sustained power. Acknowledging uncertainties and shortcomings naturally unlocks two doorways to a thriving community: humility and receptivity. The resident venerable at Deer Park Monastery, Thầy Phước Tịnh, an older Vietnamese Zen monk, was one of the most brilliant teachers I ever lived or studied with. He once shared during a public talk, on the verge of laughing, “When the monks start getting arrogant, you can just sit back and watch all the laypeople running away in the other direction!” In his typical light and humorous fashion, Thầy Phước Tịnh taught us the dangers of hubris and overconfidence while highlighting the virtues of humility.

In community life, how can we respond humbly and wisely when difficult situations arise and we don't know how to help? So often in the past, whenever I worked with clients or faced community dilemmas that exceeded my experience and insights, I tried to hide the nervousness and shame I felt about my own confusion and limitations. As a cover, I pridefully projected confidence and pretended to know the answers. That almost never worked out very well, as you can imagine. Growing up as a young cis man in the US, I was implicitly taught that not knowing means being weak and inferior, which is unsafe, whereas knowing the answers is safe because it conveys strength and dominance. I wish I could share with you all the stories of disharmony and shame in



community life that arose out of these unskillful habit energies—but that would take another book to write!

Over the years, bit by bit, I've tried to allow myself more space to not know, to not be wise, to feel vulnerable in the unknowing, even to be a fool. During difficult situations, I try to pause and breathe slowly with the feelings of discomfort, curiosity, and wonder of not knowing. I tell myself, *It's okay not to know, David. Let the sangha be your teacher. Let this difficulty be your teacher. What do they have to teach me in this moment?* The *Dhammapada* reminds us, "A fool who knows his foolishness is wise at least to that extent." I find there is really some truth in this statement— I can deal with feeling like a fool much better than feeling like a coward, afraid to just be myself. Instead of trying to be a wise teacher or therapist, I simply show up, all limitations included, and try my best to learn, love, and heal, along with everyone else. The key for me is always to listen deeply and trust that the wisdom needed is already right there, inherent within each of us and in each difficult situation that arises. Listening in this way, with humility, receptivity, and perseverance, magic naturally unfolds between us, and harmony emerges through the clouds, as clear and effortless as the sunrise.

When I first started writing *Thriving Together* nearly seven years ago, I felt a calling to transmit the depth and power of the joy I had experienced participating and living in Sangha communities over the years. What I didn't anticipate was how much each of these stories and chapters would further strengthen my own house of community. Even though I had over twenty years of sangha-building experience before starting Greatwoods Zen, I still found myself feeling completely stuck at times, doubtful about my capacity, and unsure about what steps to take next. In the beginning especially, I felt very alone. I had just separated from my partner, best friend, and fellow sangha builder, and I was learning to facilitate and organize everything by myself.

For the first six months, we had low turnouts at our weekly Days of Mindfulness. I felt alone and needed support. So I started rereading these chapters on sangha building as



In community life, how can we respond humbly and wisely when difficult situations arise and we don't know how to help?

if I were a brand new practitioner and community builder, as if someone else had written them for me. Each chapter boldly invited me into new, inspiring reflections, providing me a clear direction and practice to follow for that week alone. Small step after small step, our sangha grew. When I felt lonely and friendless, I was reminded of how to cultivate my own inner *kalyana mitra*, to strengthen my own virtues of true friendship, and I wholeheartedly planted seeds of spiritual companionship into this new community soil. Later, when our founding visions strayed into dangerously divergent directions, I knew what to do right away. Our small founding team dedicated a whole morning to just meditate and drink tea together by the pond, relishing the vibrant autumn leaves falling around us. Then we spent an hour rewriting out our visions to clarify our core purpose as an intimately committed team.

Living in a deeply racially segregated city, our leadership team, composed of mostly white men, dedicated itself to white awareness work right in the first year to bring more integrity to our mission. The chapters on white awareness and racial healing provided me with fierce encouragement, steady reminders, and faith to keep on walking that path, no matter the obstacles and resistance to this inner and collective work. We formed a racial affinity group for white men, leaning into each other's raw vulnerability and shared humanity of our own internalized wounds as a cornerstone for racial and gender identity development. The garden of our sangha's cultural humility and diversity continues to grow slowly, with stronger roots in more tender soil every month we gather.

When my sangha building partner, Nick Neild, and I started having more frequent disagreements and arguments in the midst of developing our mindfulness retreat center, the chapters on conflict and reconciliation encouraged us to re-initiate regular Beginning Anew sessions, something I had failed to prioritize. The hills we climb and peaks we ascend in our reconciliations, brotherhood, and gratitude for one another seem to reach no limits.

When I fell in love with someone who attended a nearby sister sangha, we convened our five-member Harmony and Safety Council and reviewed and renewed our healthy boundaries policy for those in leadership positions. We also sought counsel from elder practitioners and Dharma teachers in the region, bringing further safety, transparency, and ethical integrity to our young sangha, myself, and everyone involved.

The process of writing about sangha building has offered me a ceaseless fountain of inspirational suggestions, compassionate reminders, and concrete guidance on how to build my own beloved community from the inside out. No matter how long we have been practicing mindfulness, we all need supportive encouragement and reminders at times, especially during trying moments. While the wisdom of community exists in the depths of our heart, bones, and chromosomes, in every generation we are still young students

of this ancient art, with so much to learn and grow. With the nine principles described in the book as a guiding light, I feel a bright torch illuminating my path, bringing clarity and fearlessness to the obstacles and darkness we will surely encounter ahead.

In true community, we don't have to face the difficulties of our world alone. As my teacher, Thầy, frequently and enthusiastically encouraged, "Let us climb the hill of the next century, not as separate individuals, but as a sangha." Because I have a strong, loving community both at my back and in my heart, I feel ready and excited for whatever challenges and happinesses lie ahead. What we cannot do alone, we can do as a sangha. What we can embrace and heal together is far greater than what we could ever achieve individually. This is true not only for practicing mindfulness successfully, but especially for our capacity for building greater friendship, racial healing, shared joy, meaningful service, communal safety, and more. There are no limits to what we can grow together, as everything becomes more powerful in community: love, learning, hope, and our aspirations for the peaceful, harmonious world in which all of us can be ourselves fully and realize our potential.

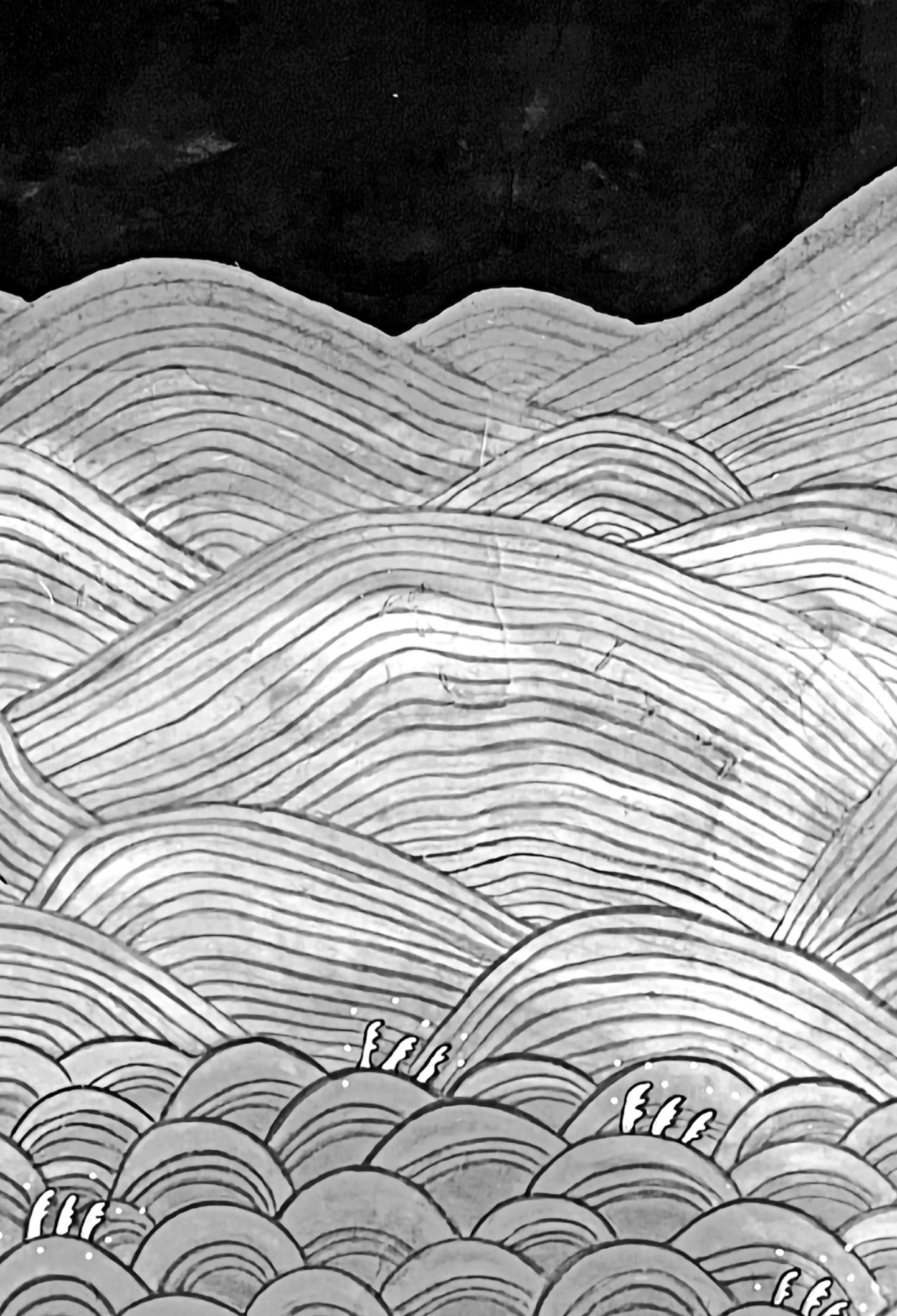
This article is based on a chapter from Thriving Together: Nine Principles for Cocreating True Community by David Viafora, published by Parallax Press in February 2025.

Photos courtesy of David Viafora

David Viafora, LICSW, Chân Thiện Sơn/True Zen Mountain (he/him) first started a local sangha where he was raised on the land of the Cahuilla Nation, in California, US, over twenty years ago, and the joyful flame of sangha building has been lit ever since. He first ordained as a monk with Thích Nhất Hạnh in 2005 and spent several years living in Plum Village tradition monasteries before finding his niche in lay community life. David now practices with Greatwoods Zen in the land of the Catawba, or Charlotte, North Carolina, US, where he currently resides. As a white-presenting Chinese-American cis man, David is committed to learning from the resiliency of his ancestors who both caused and were harmed by intergenerational trauma. Some of David's favorite things to do are drinking tea in the forest with friends, sangha game nights, conscious dance, playing with haiku, and sunset meditations.







Run to the Water

Run to the water
To rivers overflowing
Waves of the collective
Dream and rise with us

Fortress of our ancestors
Surround and guide
Echoing of legacies
Across the moonlit sky

In spirit and in struggle
Our movement is found

Protest, march, shout
Pray, rest, sing
Dance, laugh, eat
Bear witness to Love

Threads of resistance
Unravel injustice
Hope is our discipline
Liberation our vision

Streams of living water
Are washing over us
Can you feel the mist?
The thunderous waves
Pounding in our souls?

We are alive, we are breathing, we are here
Run to the water
To rivers overflowing
Humanity as one
Revolution is rising

artwork on previous page
Streams of Living Water *by Chris Yi Suh*

Chris 은미 Yi Suh (she/they) is a queer diasporic Korean artist, writer, and spiritual care practitioner. Their spiritual practice draws from the wisdom of healing justice lineages, the embodied teachings of interbeing with Plum Village, Christian liberation theologies, and Korean ancestral rituals. As a community facilitator and retreat curator, Chris holds sacred space primarily for women, femmes, queer, trans, and gender expansive folks of color. Their approach to spirit care is shaped by a decolonial, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and inter/intrareligious perspective, guided by the intention of both personal and collective liberation.





Enjoying an Apple of Mindfulness in the Big Apple

Stephen Pradarelli encounters Thầy while supporting the naming of Thích Nhất Hạnh Way in New York.

"Hey," a man riding his bike past West 109th Street and Broadway in Manhattan asked, smiling, "Y'all making a movie?"

Two large, tripod-mounted video cameras were trained on a podium bearing New York City's official seal, and a couple of other videographers with large cameras on their shoulders roamed the area. A growing crowd of lay friends, city officials, plus monks and nuns from Blue Cliff and Deer Park Monasteries, cheerful and expectant despite

chilly temperatures and an occasional sprinkle of rain, was gathering around the cordoned area.

They weren't there to be in a film, but to celebrate the naming of Thích Nhất Hạnh Way. The street isn't far from Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary, where Thầy taught in the early 1960s, sowing the seeds of Buddhism and mindfulness practice in the West.

As the communications director for the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation, I had the privilege of

being a part of this historic moment on April 11, 2025. Sitting on my rain jacket on the wet pavement in front of the podium, I felt uplifted by the energy of the gathering as I live streamed the remarks made by our monastics and others over social media.

I smiled to myself as speaker after speaker recognized Thầy's ceaseless work for peace and calm, while morning traffic rumbled along Broadway—horns honking, police sirens whooping—just beyond the gathering. The irony wasn't lost on Shaun Abreu, District 7 representative on the New York City Council and an early advocate for the street co-naming: "New Yorkers are not necessarily known for peace and stillness, but Thích Nhất Hạnh had a message for people like us. He knew that we can't build a better world if we're angry all the time, if we lose sight of each other's humanity. By putting his name right here in the heart of it all, we're creating a moment of pause, a breath, a reminder that peace isn't found in retreating from the world—it's found in how we choose to walk through it."

The presence of two people added to the joy of the moment for me: my daughter, Emma, who lives in Brooklyn and works at Columbia University-affiliated Barnard College, and a colleague, Bình Hà, the foundation's giving engagement manager. Bình had traveled from her home in Michigan to take part in the day's events.

I've worked at the foundation for a little more than three years, and this was the first time Emma could get a glimpse into her dad's job and meet some of the monks and nuns with whom I work. After the ceremony and the street sign unveiling, Emma and I joined the walking meditation to Union Theological Seminary, passing through a beautiful exhibit of Thầy's calligraphy in the Burke Library.

The day was scheduled to conclude with eating meditation, a short program of remarks, chanting, and singing in Union's James Chapel. But Emma had to step outside to take a call, and by the time we arrived, all of the vegan box lunches were gone, most of the seats were taken, and the monastics on stage had already begun

the meditation.

We managed to find a couple of seats up front and sat quietly—and hungrily (we hadn't eaten anything since early that morning)—while everyone ate their lunches. Then someone tapped me lightly on the shoulder. I turned to see an older woman with a beautiful smile offering me the apple from her lunch. (I later learned she was a good lay friend of Deer Park Monastery who had traveled from California to attend the street co-naming ceremony.) I bowed, smiled, and accepted her beautiful, and welcome, gift.

For the next fifteen minutes or so, Emma and I took turns taking a bite from the apple, passing it back and forth, chewing slowly and mindfully, sharing sips from my water bottle, and smiling at the beauty of this practice handed down by Thầy. "The practice of Zen is to eat, breathe, cook, carry water, and scrub the toilet—to infuse every act of body, speech, and mind—with mindfulness, to illuminate every leaf and pebble, every heap of garbage, every path that leads to our mind's return home," he writes in *The Miracle of Mindfulness*.

It was incredibly touching to be surrounded by so many people who are carrying on Thầy's work in one of the busiest cities of the world, to sit in a building where Thầy once taught (and perhaps meditated, perhaps began dreaming up his plans for what would become Plum Village), to receive the gift of a delicious apple and be able to share it mindfully with my daughter, and to listen, later, to the monks and nuns sing *Namo Avalokiteshvaraya*, the Chant of Compassion, and hear their voices rise like incense smoke to the vaulted ceilings of the chapel.

In that place, in that moment between the historic and ultimate dimensions Thầy often talked about, I couldn't help but remember something Anh-Huong Nguyen, Thầy's niece and a lay Dharma teacher, had said at the street co-naming ceremony: "My heart is so full, it's hard to put what I'm feeling into words. I hear Thầy saying 'This is a happy moment.' And I deeply and strongly feel Thầy is here with us."

Photos courtesy of Stephen Pradarelli

Stephen Pradarelli/Deep Integration of the Source (he/him) is the communications director for the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation and an Order of Interbeing aspirant who loves communing with nature, reading, flying, and writing haiku. Stephen, pictured with his daughter, Emma, founded and co-facilitates the Winding Path Sangha where he lives in Iowa City, Iowa, US.



**“I may be found in your way
of breathing and walking.”**

THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH

Thầy often said that when he was gone, the world would find him in the words and actions of those who embody his teachings and example.

As his spiritual offspring, Thầy invites us to live a life of compassion and generosity; to commit ourselves to the daily practice of meditation and mindfulness; and to share the Dharma through our words and actions.

One way we can continue his legacy is by supporting Thầy's global monastic community.

By giving today, you will help ensure that future generations can benefit from Thầy's teachings.

To make a one-time gift or to join our loving community of monthly donors, the Plum Blossom Society, visit TNHF.org/donate

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AS A YOUNG DHARMA TEACHER IN VIETNAM,

Thầy trained a group of 13 students to become
“like strong cedars to help support the Buddha’s
teachings,” revitalize Buddhism, and meet the
needs of people suffering during difficult times.

Named the Thirteen Cedars, they helped ensure
that Thầy’s work continued after the war and made
it possible for his teachings to take root in the
West. **We are here because they were there.**

A number of the Thirteen Cedars are still with us;
our aspiration is to grow a forest of 1,300. We invite
you to join the Cedar Society and help us share
Thầy’s teachings and practices for generations to
come with your legacy gift.

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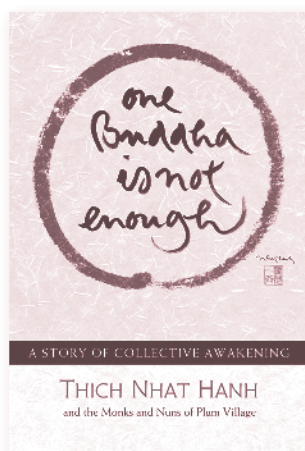
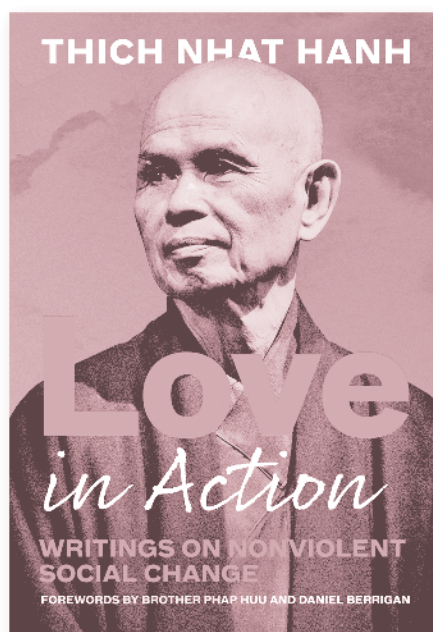
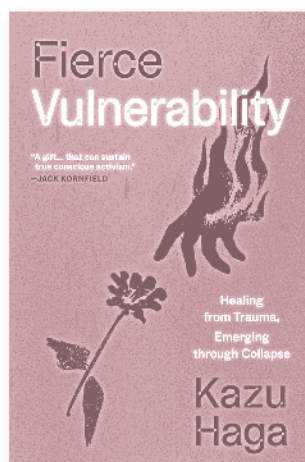
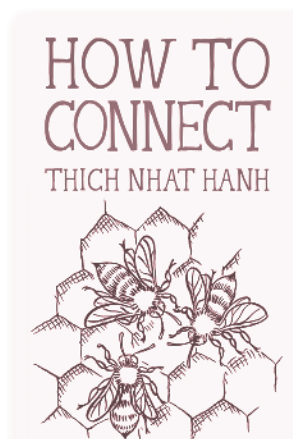
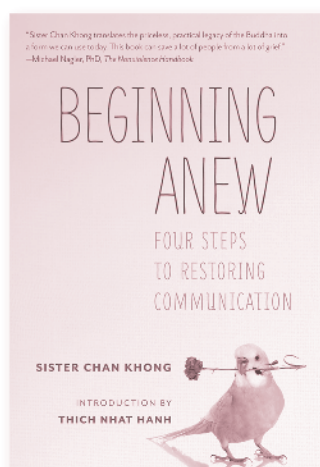
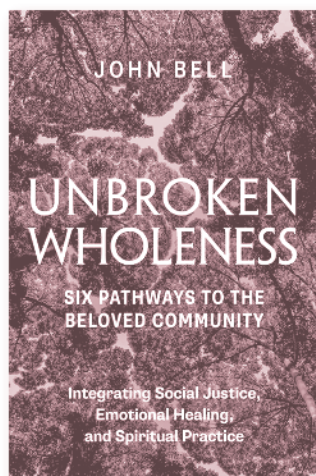
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Plum Village

Practice Centers & Resources

The practice centers and monasteries listed here all practice in the Plum Village tradition of Thích Nhất Hạnh. The centers are generally open throughout the year, for short or long stays, to help us learn the art of mindful living. In addition to in-person and online retreats, the practice centers offer regular Days of Mindfulness and other events. Please visit their websites for information and resources.

We can deepen our practice with the many resources in the Plum Village tradition available online: the sangha directory, community initiatives, guided meditations, Dharma talks, books, articles, news, songs, and much more.

Blue Cliff Monastery, New York, US
bluecliffmonastery.org

Deer Park Monastery, California, US
deerparkmonastery.org

Magnolia Grove Monastery, Mississippi, US
magnoliagrovermonastery.org

Plum Village, France
plumvillage.org

Healing Spring Monastery, France
healingspringmonastery.org

Maison de l'Inspir, France
maisondelinspir.over-blog.com

European Institute of Applied Buddhism, Germany
eiab.eu

Stream Entering Monastery, Australia
nhaplueu.org

Mountain Spring Monastery, Australia
mountainspringmonastery.org

Asian Institute of Applied Buddhism, Hong Kong
pvfhk.org

Plum Village Thailand
thaipumvillage.org

The Mindfulness Bell
mindfulnessbell.org

Parallax Press
parallax.org

The Plum Village App
plumvillage.app

The Way Out Is In Podcast
plumvillage.org/podcasts/the-way-out-is-in

The Raft
thichnhathanhfoundation.org/the-raft

Thích Nhất Hạnh Dharma Talks
tnhaudio.org

ARISE Sangha
arisesangha.org

Happy Farm
thehappyfarm.org

Earth Holder Community
earthholder.training

Wake Up
wkup.org

Wake Up Schools
wakeupschools.org

Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation
thichnhathanhfoundation.org

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IN THE PLUM VILLAGE TRADITION OF THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH

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The Issue 95 cover photo was taken by David Nelson.*

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